EXPLORING THE FELT EXPERIENCE OF NONDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read EXPLORING THE FELT EXPERIENCE OF NONDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS by Michal Saccoman Fire, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the question: What is the felt experience of nondual consciousness? Borrowing from Eugene Gendlin's (1962) description, "felt experiencing" refers specifically to that "inner sense," which can be located and directly referred to when attention is directed inwardly, which is at once so simple and universally experienced that it is not easily pointed to (p. 12). "Nondual consciousness" specifically refers to that experience in which one's sense of internal self ("I") is no longer experienced as separate from external phenomena (world).

Eight participants were interviewed regarding their subjectively felt experience of nondual consciousness as they have experienced this phenomenon in their lives over time as well as directly, during the research interview itself. Using a qualitative phenomenological method to capture and explore the lived experience of nondual consciousness, and a consensual coding technique to analyze participant interviews, this study aims to fill the gap between theory and experience, offering a stronger foundation for research of nondual phenomenon in general. Results suggest that participants' experience of nondual consciousness is unmistakably felt and can be described, not just in theory, but in the moment.

Two primary categories related to the felt experience of nondual consciousness (NDC) are presented. The first refers to participants' experience of NDC in their lives overall. Six subcategories with corresponding themes related to this experience are identified including (a) terminology related to NDC, (b) personal ideas regarding the nature of NDC, (c) NDC as a process over time, (d) supports for NDC, (e) impact of NDC on life, and (f) conditions related to the experience of NDC. The second category relates to the directly felt experience of nondual consciousness (NDC), and includes two subcategories with corresponding themes. These include (a) the essential qualities of the felt experience of NDC, and (b) the felt sense of NDC. The implications of these findings are significant for both the field of clinical psychology and spirituality, suggesting that what is beyond our personal psychologies can be experienced as something felt and functioning within what we often consider to be the most mundane of forms, the human body.

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Dedication

To Olive.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness

As the interest and experience of those in the West is becoming more integrated with those teachings traditionally from the East, we see an awakening of interest in nondual wisdom within the field of psychology. This wisdom asserts that there is an innate, and therefore, universal, potential for experiencing an unconstructed, nonintentional dimension of consciousness, in which experience simply is “what is,” without a separate self to witness or experience it (Blackstone, 2005, 2007). In the context of this dissertation, “nondual consciousness” specifically refers to that experience in which one’s sense of internal self (“I”) is no longer experienced as separate from external phenomena (world). Although there are innumerable philosophical debates about this state of consciousness, and much that has been written about nonduality in general, few empirical studies have actually explored the subjectively felt experience of nondual consciousness.

Borrowing from Eugene Gendlin’s (1962) description, “felt experiencing” in the current study, refers specifically to the inner concrete flow of “something present, directly referred to, and felt” (p. 243). It is that “inner sense,” which can be located when attention is directed inwardly, which is at once so simple and universally experienced that it is not easily pointed to (p. 12). Despite its seeming elusiveness and ineffable quality, felt experiencing appears to be a process that lays the grounding for psychological phenomena in general (Gendlin, 1996; Johnson, 2007).

Despite the importance of subjective felt experiencing as a universal human phenomena, there remains surprisingly little systematic research in this area. Whether due to the challenges in studying subjective experience, much of which takes place below the threshold of consciousness, or a historic bias towards content versus process models for research, the exclusion of research in this area seems an unfortunate and unnecessary limitation to the study of human experience (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Gendlin, 1962; Petitmengin, 2006). Although it is still commonly asserted that data can only be considered scientific if it is gathered by an objective external observer and can be identically reproducible, a growing number of researchers have concluded that research must not be confined to outside observations, but must also include the study of subjective experience from within (Jack & Roepstorff, 2003, 2004; Petitmengin, 2006; Varela & Shear, 1999).

Despite a paucity of research exploring dimensions of subjective felt experience, several researchers have made considerable contributions to this relatively unexplored area. In his work developing out of 15 years of research at the University of Chicago, Eugene Gendlin has been a pioneer in the study of subjective felt experiencing in the context of psychotherapy, showing that the subjective inner experiencing of clients in therapy plays a vital role in therapeutic change (1962, 1981). Researchers Leslie Greenberg and Jeremy Safran, who were students of Gendlin's, offered their own contributions to research on subjective experiencing, focusing more specifically on the emotional dimensions of experience. Although several researchers have gone on to expand research in the

area of subjective experiencing (Johnson, 2007; Petitmengen-Peugeot, 1999, 2006), to date, Gendlin and Greenberg and Safran have offered the most extensive systematic research in this important area.

There are, however, limitations to current models of subjective felt experiencing. The first, and most relevant to the current study, is that this research and the models developed as a result, have studied subjective experiencing only as far as the dimensions of egoic consciousness are concerned. In this way, current models of experience have not examined the felt sense of experiences beyond the egoic level. Most of the world's spiritual traditions, however, identify states of consciousness in which the experience of one's internal experience as separate from external phenomena, dissolve. Asian philosophical traditions, in fact, suggest that egoic consciousness itself emerges out of the individual's construction of ego-identity, and that basic human suffering is a result of believing that identity to be objectively real.

A psychospiritual worldview, grounded in transpersonal psychology, offers a framework within which the felt experience of nondual consciousness might be explored in its broadest dimensions. In the present context, the term "psychospiritual" refers specifically to the bringing together, and honoring, of both psychological and spiritual aspects of human experience. This worldview, while acknowledging the importance of individual egoic processes, emphasizes the value of processes and experiences that fall beyond the domain of the personal ego (Cortright, 1997).

In contrast to much of traditional psychology, transpersonal psychology, which acknowledges the multifaceted nature of human experience, has made great efforts to scientifically study exactly those experiences that have been left out of the field of traditional psychology for so long (Lukoff & Lu, 2005). By drawing on wisdom from the world's spiritual traditions, which have for over 25 centuries offered techniques for exploring inner experiences, this field holds enormous potential for the study of subjective experience (Petitmengin, 2006).

There is considerable clinical relevance to an exploration of the felt experience of nondual consciousness. Firstly, following the assumptions of the transpersonal model, to study the felt experience of such a unique and important human phenomenon more accurately values multiple dimensions of human experience. Furthermore, the traditional therapeutic context, by virtue of its focus on observable change, may inadvertently impose an orientation towards change in any study of subjective experience. Although it is impossible to remove external influences, a psychospiritual worldview, with its emphasis on non-goal oriented approaches, offers a possibility for experiencing that does not necessarily follow a predictable trajectory. Finally, given the common intention of both spirituality and therapy to relieve suffering, and the increasing popularity of spirituality in the West, a systematic study of nondual consciousness offers a small, albeit important, contribution to the field of psychology.

Purpose of Study

The specific aim of this study was to (a) capture and describe the inwardly felt experience of nondual consciousness and reflections about nondual consciousness, and (b) explore and examine the conditions, situations, and context for nondual consciousness. This study is intended to shine light on this significant, albeit rarely analyzed, area of human experience, but does not aim to define it. The hope would be that such research inspire and offer initial guideposts to others in this ongoing effort to expand knowledge in the realm of transformative human experience.

Eight participants were interviewed inquiring into their experiences of the presence of nondual consciousness within their lives, and in regards to their felt experience of nondual consciousness as it was occurring in the interview itself. A consensual coding technique developed by Dr. Katherine McGovern of the California Institute of Integral Studies and Boyatzis' (1998) qualitative thematic analysis method were used to code transcripts of the interviews. Given the paucity of current research regarding the felt experience of nondual consciousness, and the developing evidence of the importance of such research a design of this nature was deemed particularly appropriate (on the importance of transpersonal qualitative research, see Braud & Anderson, 1998; Creswell, 2007; on the study of subjective/embodied experience, see Johnson, 2007; Petitmengin, 2006; Petitmengin-Puegeot, 1999).

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 2, the literature review, presents the major theoretical and empirical works in several areas relevant to the present study. Beginning with a statement about the importance for studying nondual consciousness, Chapter 2 then gives an overview and rationale for a transpersonal orientation, which outlines the important historical landmarks, assumptions, and principles of the transpersonal orientation and psychospiritual framework within it.

Following this, a more in-depth overview of nondual consciousness is offered, including the major philosophical debates within the spiritual and psychospiritual literature. Then, an overview of the area of psychotherapy process, or "experiencing" research is presented, from both a psychological and psychospiritual perspective. Select models and topics within these perspectives are outlined and a rationale for their relevance in the present study is offered. These models include, in the psychological domain, Eugene Gendlin and Leslie Greenberg and Jeremy Safran's work on subjective experiencing in psychotherapy. In the psychospiritual domain, John Welwood's conceptualization of psychospiritual development is described.

Building on the psychospiritual literature, a more in-depth discussion of "inquiry" as described in the psychological and spiritual literature is offered as one important tool in accessing nondual consciousness. Chapter 2 goes on to offer an integrated discussion of the research, remaining unresolved issues, and the research questions.

Following the presentation of the literature review, Chapter 3: Methods, begins with an overview and rationale for the methodology to be used in the present study; operational definitions regarding the research questions are offered, followed by a review of the participant information, selection criteria, and parameters of the interviews. A discussion of the research approach and overall research procedure of the study itself are then presented. Following this will be a discussion of the chosen methodology design and a description of the actual data analysis procedure.

Chapter 4: Results, includes a presentation of the final coding template developed from the data analysis. Following this, the results of this study, including narrative examples, are presented. Finally, Chapter 5: Discussion, includes a discussion of the major findings presented in the results chapter, their possible meaning, and their relevance to the proposed research questions. Implications of the results in regards to psychological and transpersonal theory, as well as spirituality, are presented. Finally, the overall clinical implications of the results, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Why Study Nondual Consciousness?

As the interest and experience of those in the West is becoming more integrated with those teachings traditionally from the East, increasingly we see an emergence “of an essential dialogue, stripped of its cultural forms and roles, between the conditioned mind and that awareness which is unconditioned, open, and unknown…The fruit of this dialogue has been an accelerated awakening of nondual wisdom” (Prendergast, 2003, p. 2). Although nondual teachings, primarily from the Asian philosophical traditions have a long history, they provide a perspective that for many Westerners is relatively new. As such, this perspective is a timely one and offers opportunities for academic scholarship for several reasons.

Firstly, although extensive descriptions of nondual consciousness are found within the spiritual philosophical traditions, relatively few accounts have been offered from within the field of psychology. Beginning over 1,000 years ago with the Indian Vedas and continuing today, there is a vast body of literature that attempts to describe and define nondual consciousness (Blackstone, 2005; Loy, 1988; Prendergast, 2003, 2007). Despite inherent challenges, many different cultures and religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have made attempts at articulating this ineffable experience (Forman, 1998). Within the Asian traditions, which include Hindu Advaita Vedanta, Kashmiri Shavaism, Tibetan and Zen Buddhism among others, each tradition refers to some aspect of

nondual consciousness in their teachings (Blackstone, 2005). Whether described as "suchness" in Zen, or Buddha-nature (*tathagatagarbha*) in Tibetan Buddhism, these traditions each assert that the potential for experiencing an unconstructed, nonintentional dimension of consciousness, in which experience is simply "what is," without a separate self to witness or experience it, is innate, and therefore universal, among human beings (Blackstone, 2005). Although the ways in which nondual consciousness is articulated and interpreted vary, the experience that they describe is recognizably the same (Forman, 1998).

The Transpersonal Psychology Historical Framework

Drawing on the contributions of both Eastern wisdom and Western science, and derived from the Latin root *trans-,* meaning "beyond or across," and *personal* referring to the ego or self, transpersonal psychology points us towards acknowledging that which is inherent to the individual or personal and that which extends beyond the egoic self, encompassing wider aspects of life, humankind, psyche, and cosmos (Cortright, 1997; Walsh & Vaughn, 1996). On the most basic level, the transpersonal view

> is that a complete concept of mental health must include both psychological and spiritual dimensions. It must consist of the psychological integration or cohesion of the surface self plus some degree of connection of this surface self to its deeper, unconditioned spiritual source. (Cortright, 1997, p. 48)

A study of nondual consciousness is keenly in line with the principles of the transpersonal worldview and psychospiritual framework, both of which will be described below.

A brief history and definition.

The field of transpersonal psychology emerged in the United States in the sociopolitical context of the 1960s where shifting ideas and values, and the exploration of new forms of living dominated the scene (Anderson, 1998). In many ways, William James' (1890) notion of "radical empiricism," with an emphasis on the importance of "pure experience," and discussion of topics that became grounding for transpersonal research and therapy, paved the way for current transpersonal theory (Bricklin, 2003). In addition to James, transpersonal psychology was founded on much of the work of thinkers such as Carl G. Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham Maslow, and Aldous Huxley (Sutich, 1996). Many more great thinkers can be credited with building on these early theorists and informing this still emerging field, including among others, Stanislav Grof, Ken Wilber, Michael Washburn, James Fadiman, Robert Frager, Anthony Sutitch, Sonja Margulies, Michael Murphy, and Miles Vich (Anderson, 1998; Lukoff & Lu, 2005).

From its inception in the late 1960s, transpersonal psychology included as one of its distinguishing characteristics, "a keen desire, even an urgency, to integrate the learnings and spiritual practices of indigenous and ancient spiritual traditions," including drawing on forms of shamanism, Buddhism and Hinduism, and mystical forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well (Anderson, 1998, p. xxi). In many ways, the field was initially defined by, and placed an emphasis on altered states of consciousness, however, in recent studies, authors have found that transpersonal psychology has undergone a significant evolution, and can

more aptly be described now as, “an inclusive psychology that studies and cultivates the transformation of society and the individual in the contexts of physical embodiment, community, ecology, and the transpersonal ultimate” (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007, p. 13). Although still not fully recognized by mainstream psychology, transpersonal psychology has gained momentum outside the United States and continues to grow as a respected framework within the field (Anderson, 1998).

Although there is no one clearly articulated definition of transpersonal psychology, several authors have attempted to integrate the most salient aspects of this field, highlighting that, rather than lacking a concise definition, “transpersonal psychology has a rich, vital core that has been difficult to contain in few words” (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007, p. 12; Hutton, 1994). Brant Cortright (1997), transpersonal theorist, academic, and clinician, describes transpersonal psychology by its integrative nature, bringing together what is known in modern psychology with the wisdom of the world’s spiritual traditions. In this way, transpersonal psychology concerns both development of the self as it is known in traditional psychology, which includes Freud’s formulations of the id, ego, and superego, with the desire to grow beyond the self. From the transpersonal perspective, according to Cortright (1997), “consciousness is seen to be a vast, multidimensional existence where ever new aspects of Being are manifested” (p. 9). This perspective, like all of transpersonal theory and theory itself, is not meant to define reality itself, but instead offers a particular way of organizing one’s experience of reality (Cortright, 1997).

Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007) offer one of the most comprehensive summary definitions of transpersonal psychology based on a thematic analysis of definitions published from 1969-2003. Drawing on the work of many scholars of several decades, their composite definition states that transpersonal psychology is, "An approach to psychology that (a) studies phenomena beyond the ego as context for (b) an integrative/holistic psychology; this provides a framework for (c) understanding and cultivating human transformation" (p. 11).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I draw on both Cortright's description of transpersonal theory and consciousness within the transpersonal worldview, as well as the composite definition of Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin who further emphasize the importance in studying beyond-ego phenomena as an integral aspect of the understanding and cultivation of transformation. Along with a more detailed description of the basic assumptions and principles of the transpersonal orientation, these lay the backdrop for the present study.

Basic assumptions and principles.

Transpersonal psychology, like humanistic psychology from which it emerged, is a growth-oriented model, holding a belief in the inherent thrust towards self-actualization (Walsh & Vaughn, 1996). In contrast to its predecessor, however, the transpersonal orientation acknowledges that both the personal and *trans*personal dimension are important to the actualization of full human growth, and as such, perhaps the primary assumption of a transpersonal worldview is that

the individual cannot be defined simply as a self or isolated ego, but is rather, a spiritual being (Firman & Vargiu, 1996; Sperry, 2001.).

Important to an understanding of the transpersonal worldview, and the exploration of nondual consciousness, is the fact that both the self in all of its traditional vicissitudes, as well as spirit in all of its myriad meanings, are necessary components of what defines wholeness.

> Thus the self is still very much the focus in transpersonal psychotherapy. But by moving across traditional personal psychology to the larger spiritual context, the individual self moves out of its existential vacuum into a wider dimension to which the world's spiritual teachings point…Transpersonal psychology studies how the spiritual is expressed in and through the personal, as well as the transcendence of the self. (Cortright, 1997, p. 10)

Brant Cortright (1997) outlines eight principles that underlie the transpersonal approach. These are that:

1. Our essential nature is spiritual.
2. Consciousness is multidimensional.
3. Human beings have valid urges toward spiritual seeking, expressed as a search for wholeness through deepening individual, social, and transcendent awareness.
4. Contacting a deeper source of wisdom and guidance within is both possible and helpful to growth.
5. Uniting a person's conscious will and aspiration with the spiritual impulse is a superordinate health value.
6. Altered states of consciousness are one way of accessing transpersonal experiences and can be an aid in healing and growth.
7. Our life and actions are meaningful.
8. The transpersonal context shapes how the person/client is viewed (pp. 16-21).

The finding that experiences of nonduality are not uncommon, and the developing field of nondual psychology, are testaments to the importance of these principles. Cortright's guiding principals emphasize the positive aspects of fostering the spiritual in the human; however, his orientation does not address the potential and inherent challenges and spiritual crises that may arise in the process.

Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (1996) define four basic tenets of a transpersonal framework, several of which overlap with Cortright's principles. These tenets are regarding the dimensions of consciousness, conditioning, personality, and identification. First, in contrast to traditional psychology, which tends to see normal consciousness as being the apex of development, transpersonal psychology views optimum consciousness as a freeing up from the contractions and obstacles that tend to restrict normal consciousness, achieved primarily through a quieting of the mind. Second, in regards to conditioning, transpersonal psychology asserts that we are more entangled in our conditioning than is generally acknowledged and that freedom from this intertwined and attached condition is possible. Third, in the realm of personality, transpersonal psychology gives less weight than traditional psychological theory to the importance of personality as the primary defining feature of the person. In fact, development may require a disidentification from one's personality rather than modifications alone. Finally, regarding identification, the transpersonal approach posits that we are extremely identified with internal processes and phenomena to a much greater degree than acknowledged by traditional psychology, which recognizes identification primarily on the level of external object relations. Walsh

and Vaughan's tenets are especially in line with the study of nondual consciousness, which may be an example of the disentangling of conditioning, and a glimpse of the person beyond personality. Whether or not the freeing up of normal consciousness is achieved primarily through a quieting of the mind is debatable. In this regard Walsh and Vaughan seem to give preference to meditative techniques that suggest this is the case. Looking at the felt experience of nondual consciousness may offer more information about whether or not this does seem to be the primary means by which consciousness is disentangled.

The Psychospiritual Framework

Often described as the paradigm from which transpersonal theory is conceptualized, the psychospiritual framework honors both those aspects attributed to the personal psyche and spirit as well. Because this dissertation will draw from the work of authors, theorists, and practitioners in both the psychological and spiritual domain a discussion of the psychospiritual framework, including its assumptions about human experience, development, and transformation is included.

Transpersonal author and clinician John Welwood (2000) elaborates on the importance of integrating psyche and spirit in stating, "Western psychology has mostly neglected the spiritual domain, to its detriment, while the contemplative paths have lacked an adequate understanding of psychological dynamics, which inevitably play a major part in the process of spiritual development" (p. xvi). Welwood goes on to say that Western psychology has

failed to see the "larger dimension of being," and has instead remained stuck on seeing the self as defined by the conventional ego (2000, p. 41).

Transpersonal theory and a psychospiritual framework then, according to theorist Michael Washburn (1995),

> is not a one-sided psychology of religion or an exclusively spiritual psychology. It is rather a project that attempts a true synthesis of spiritual and psychological perspectives, a synthesis that involves a thorough rethinking of each of these perspectives in terms of the other. (p. 1)

In its understanding of development and transformation, the honoring of both psyche and spirit is seen clearly.

Welwood (2000), for example, envisions the process of human growth and transformation as an unfolding within which he differentiates between *horizontal* and *vertical* shifts. Horizontal shifts are those in which who we are expands, and the knots of who we have been loosen and unravel. Vertical shifts, in contrast, refer to those expansions in which we move from our personality-bound experience to the realm of pure being (2000). In some ways, psychological work can be seen as addressing the aspects of self that tend to result in horizontal shifts while spiritual work encourages vertical shifts.

Cortright (1997) describes the psychospiritual framework as one in which psychological work, rather than being relegated to a lesser position, is situated within the larger container of spiritual unfolding; ultimately, work on the level of personal ego is seen as an integral component in spiritual purification. Optimal health then, is not merely defined by psychological health, but is also inextricably linked to spiritual well-being. According to Cortright (1997), central to this integrative framework is "the movement and growth of consciousness—its

development, vicissitudes, and varied expressions in its divine unfolding" (p. 49). Cortright goes on to say that consciousness is thus the proper subject matter within this framework.

> Conventional psychology studies consciousness at various levels and stages of development, that is, as consciousness is conditioned, expressed, and modified by the structures of the self. Spiritual systems study consciousness insofar as it transcends or encompasses more than the self, that is, in its unconditioned levels. (p. 49)

Honoring both psychology and spirituality, a psychospiritual approach aims to study consciousness in all of its manifestations from the developmental aspects of psyche to the most ineffable aspects of spiritual transformation.

Psyche and spirit.

> Spiritual and psychological systems…are but those abiding descriptions and metaphors that have resonated most deeply with human experience over time. Both spiritual and psychological traditions speak to what we are, to what is wrong with the human condition, and to the transformative possibilities open to us. (Cortright, 1997, pp. 25-26)

Psyche.

Traditional psychology has historically given weight to the idea of the individual as an encapsulated being, influenced primarily by external forces, and experiencing a seemingly endless number of often conflicting internal impulses and desires, emotions, and reactions, much of which appear to be generated below the level of consciousness. Psychological health, from this perspective, entails an ever-increasing awareness of one's internal psychological experience, usually with the guidance of a therapist who can help unravel, or interpret, the underlying meaning of one's experience. Within this paradigm, the ego is seen as the

integrating function of this internal experience. Strengthening the ego and freeing it up from old and maladaptive patterns is often the aim of psychological work.

> In the psychological realm the ego is perceived to be a positive phenomenon, describing a wide variety of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes essential to healthy survival. "Personal" concerns are likely to benefit from a therapeutic framework where emotional and relational needs are explicitly addressed on a consistent basis, prioritizing a gradual path of healing over dramatic peaks of experience. (Spalding, 2008, p. 13)

For the purposes of this dissertation, "egoic consciousness" then is a personal, subjective experience, related to one's own psychological history and makeup. From the perspective of traditional psychology, experiences in which egoic consciousness shifts beyond the usual confines of the personal ego are generally dismissed, believed to indicate pathology.

Spirit.

The world's spiritual traditions, in contrast to traditional psychology, view the core of who we are as spiritual rather than psychological in nature. In describing the ways in which spirituality has been expressed in the world's major religions, theorist Brant Cortright (1997) distinguishes two main emphases: those which are theistic and place importance on a Personal Divine, and the nondual traditions, which place emphasis on an impersonal Divine. Because of the general tendency of most Western traditions to fall in the former category and Eastern traditions to be associated with the latter, the terms "East" and "West" are often used as such. It should be noted though that there are also examples of spiritual

traditions that do not fall neatly into these categories (such as the Western mystical traditions which emphasize the nondual).

Most spirituality in the West, emerging from the general notion of the individual as separate, has viewed the Soul as having a unique relationship with the Divine (Spirit), a relationship which, if cut off, results in an experience of existential alienation and fundamental loss. The goal of spiritual practice then is to cultivate and remember this inherent connection by coming into deeper communion with the Divine (Cortright, 1997). Within these traditions, practices that serve to cultivate a deeper relationship between the Soul and the Spirit are valued.

In contrast, spirituality that is more nondual in nature views the Divine as an impersonal presence, or rather, "a formless, nameless, impersonal spiritual reality which is ultimately revealed as the ground of being," and the individual self as an illusory construct (Cortright, 1997, p. 27). In so doing, these traditions place greater emphasis on the merging of the self into this ground of being, revealing that the two are in fact one and the same. Spiritual practices aim to free up consciousness from its unconscious belief in the self's concrete existence, and release it into "the pure vastness of spirit" (Cortright, 1997, p. 32).

Philosopher Huston Smith (1976), who has written extensively on the world's religions and spiritual traditions, describes four levels of identity and four levels of existence that are common to the framework of most spiritual cosmologies. These dimensions are those defined by the perennial philosophy, espoused by Aldous Huxley (1945), which asserts that there are universal themes

shared by the world's religions that can be distilled and identified. These levels are:

1. body (inhabiting the terrestrial plane);
2. mind (inhabiting the intermediate plane);
3. soul (inhabiting the celestial plane);
4. spirit (inhabiting the infinite plane) (Smith, 1976).

In many ways, constructs of traditional psychology are encompassed by the first two levels, while spiritual constructs are generally encompassed by the latter two. A psychospiritual framework attempts to incorporate all of these levels by emphasizing the importance of both psyche and spirit.

A Paradigm for Exploration

Despite significant advances in transpersonal psychology, the willingness of mainstream psychology to accept this framework as representing a legitimate scientific endeavor is still weak (Grof, 1996). However, based on a review of the existing evidence, the transpersonal approach is scientifically justifiable, both in its theoretical framework and clinical relevance (Grof, 1996). For this reason, it is worth articulating the possible reasons for the lack of acceptance and the importance in research that is grounded in a psychospiritual framework.

According to major theorist and researcher Stanislav Grof (1996),

> The main reason for this criticism is the fact that the findings and conclusions of the transpersonal disciplines are incompatible with the most basic metaphysical assumptions of the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm and with the materialistic philosophy that has dominated Western science for the last three hundred years. (p. 45)

Modern psychology, in its definition of consciousness, has defined “normal” consciousness as that which exists within the boundaries of our skin. Transpersonal psychology, in contrast, includes those aspects of experience in which consciousness seems to expand beyond the spatial or temporal boundaries of the body or time. Modern psychology has further limited its perspective of mind and consciousness by virtue of its emphasis on content versus experiential process (Welwood, 2000). The overwhelming number of researchers who have identified and experienced phenomena which cannot be interpreted merely on the intrapsychic level, suggests that attempts to dismiss their existence are unfounded and naïve (Grof, 1996).

Even so, researchers Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (1996) argue that transpersonal theory currently lacks an experimental base, rendering many of the concerns and assumptions within this framework to go untested. Walsh and Vaughan go on to say,

> if the transpersonal is truly to be what it claims to strive for—namely an effective synthesis of Eastern wisdom and Western science—its practitioners need to do all they can to ensure that their work is subjected to careful scientific scrutiny. (p. 29)

The hope in doing this, as Cortright (1997) asserts, is that, “this will result in a more psychologically informed spirituality and a spiritually-based psychology” (p. 23). This dissertation aims to contribute to research of this kind.

Subjective Experiencing

“Felt experiencing,” in this dissertation refers to what Eugene Gendlin (1962) describes as the ongoing concrete flow of feeling, to which you can attend

inwardly, at any given moment, if you wish. Although experiencing, according to Gendlin, plays a role in behavior and in the creation of meaning, it is not, in and of itself, a logically schematic construct, regardless of its complexity. Even so, Gendlin asserts, “experience must be referred to directly—it must be thought of as that partly unformed stream of feeling that we have every moment” (1962, p. 3). In contrast to some other definitions of “experiencing,” Gendlin uses the term to refer specifically to “something present, directly referred to, and felt” (1962, p. 243).

Whether due to the challenges in studying subjective experience, much of which takes place below the threshold of consciousness, or a historic bias towards content versus process models for research, this area of human experience has received scant attention in the scientific literature (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Gendlin, 1962; Petitmengin, 2006). Whatever the challenges have been, a cogent argument can be made for the importance of researching subjective experience. The following section describes the reasons why research in this area is so important, and how subjective experience has been defined and researched to date. Following this, several models are described from both the psychological and psychospiritual domains.

Subjective experiencing and psychotherapy process research.

Despite a paucity of research exploring subjective experience, strong arguments for the importance of exploring this area of human phenomenon have been made. Humanistic clinician and theorist Carl Rogers (1959), was a pioneer

in the emphasis he placed on experience itself in the therapeutic process. Seeing the value in what was *happening* with clients versus what was merely being said, Rogers argued for the creation of a methodology, "whereby we might give operational definition to the construct *experience* [sic] in our theory, so that discrepancies between self-concept and experience, awareness and experience, etc. might be measured" (as cited in Gendlin, 1962, p. 48). Eugene Gendlin, who was a student of Rogers and himself became a prominent psychotherapy process researcher, argued that new "process" models for research (in contrast to "content" models) for the study of experiencing must be developed and utilized given the importance of experiencing as a human phenomenon (1962). Gendlin went on to suggest that the resistance towards considering "directly felt experiencing" a worthy area of study has more to do with the limitations in our current assumptions and methods of scientific inquiry (1962, p. 2).

One of the main reasons for the difficulty in studying subjective experience is that beyond any positivist prejudices, "we know that the largely 'pre-thought' character of actual subjective experiences renders it extremely difficult to elaborate a method which would enable one to become aware of it and describe it" (Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999, p. 44). Gendlin (1962) suggests that the preconceptual nature of experiencing has not been fully appreciated in the sciences, nor are many of our scientific concepts suited for describing preconceptual phenomena.

Felt experience appears to be largely about process versus content, which seems to be mediated by the conceptual mind. By definition, the conceptual mind

cannot be with experience directly and intimately because its role is to stand separate from experience and represent it, to name it, to judge it, and to compare it (Hunt, 2003). In contrast, "the direct experience of anything automatically engages our *nonseparate being* [sic]," which makes it almost a paradox in the realm of research which tends towards the description of concrete separate constructs (Hunt, 2003, p. 166). As Gendlin (1962) points out, "the scientific method that dominates contemporary psychology does not adequately tap subjectivity" (p. 49). Challenges aside, process researcher Claire Petitmengin (2006) argues,

> We are on the threshold of a vast area of research, which has been very little explored in our culture, that of subjective experience. We have a great deal of work to do: we need to improve our methods in order to study it, and create a language to talk about it, in order to federate the community of researchers and people from a wide range of backgrounds that is currently being constituted around this new field. This exploration could considerably transform not only our vision of the world, but also the way we live in the world. (pp. 260-261)

From a transpersonal perspective, the study of subjective experience is not merely about exploration of experiences understood within the psychological domain, but also about the investigation of even deeper and subtler dimensions. This adds an even greater difficulty to these studies and may require, as Walsh and Vaughan (1996) assert, the development of increasingly subtle tools for the study of psychological phenomena.

Subjective experiencing: A psychological perspective.

Despite the obvious challenges in studying subjective experience, several researchers and authors have in fact offered important contributions to this still

emerging area of scholarship. For the purposes of this dissertation I will highlight one in particular, Dr. Eugene Gendlin. Due to the important contribution that Gendlin has made to the field of psychology in general and the study of subjective experience itself, an overview of his research provides a valuable anchoring point for what is known about subjective experience and how this phenomenon is conceptualized within the psychological domain. Gendlin’s psychotherapy process research remains a highly respected systematic inquiry into subjective experience, repeatedly referred to and built upon in more recent studies. Furthermore, Gendlin’s Focusing method, as a conceptual model for subjective experience in the therapeutic context, derived from his research, will provide an important framework for comparison in this dissertation.

Eugene Gendlin and Focusing.

Eugene Gendlin’s work developed out of 15 years of research at the University of Chicago in which he found that successful outcomes in psychotherapy were not dependent on any particular therapeutic technique or on the specific content of sessions. Rather, patients who showed success all shared a commonality in terms of their process and in what they were able to do “inside themselves” (Gendlin, 1981, p. 4). In so doing, Gendlin suggested that in order to examine *experience,* the focus of inquiry had to move from content to process itself (1996). It is worth pointing out that for Gendlin, subjective experiencing is contrasted with those models that emphasize changes derived solely through conceptualization, such as Carl Rogers’ (1958) model. Although

conceptualization may be an aspect of human experience, *experiencing* itself is what provides the "direct referent" that, through conceptualization, may then be pointed to (Rickard, 2008).

In his research, Gendlin examined and analyzed psychotherapy transcripts to identify significant markers in those clients who experienced successful therapeutic changes. Gendlin made two major discoveries which became the grounding for what became the popularized technique of Focusing, which in many ways is the model by which Gendlin conceptualizes subjective experiencing. The first was that every aspect of who we are and how we live is informed by a bodily awareness which is experienced as a felt sense that we can contact if we attend to it. The second was that, if this sense is approached in just the right way, it will change. And when the felt sense of any given situation shifts, we shift (Gendlin, 1981).

In a way, Focusing is simply a technique for moving from the conceptual level of mind to the feeling or experiential level of mind-body itself (Welwood, 2000). It is a process in which a special kind of bodily awareness, which Gendlin calls a "felt sense," is contacted and attended to in a particular way.

> A felt sense is usually not just there, it must form…When it comes it is at first *unclear* [sic], fuzzy…A felt sense is not an emotion…it is vague and murky, It feels meaningful, but not known. It is a body-sense of meaning. (Gendlin, 1981, p. 11)

The felt sense does not come as a thought or word, but as a whole bodily feeling, and in this way, may not easily be put into words at first. For Gendlin, the importance in Focusing is that by contacting the felt sense, a process which brings change is initiated (1981).

Focusing itself is a process of six movements which, when successful, result in a shift which is felt on a physical level (i.e., a "felt shift"). These movements involve the process of clearing a space, coming into contact with a felt sense, getting a handle on it, resonating with the handle, asking the felt sense, and receiving whatever comes (1981, 1996). In Focusing, the individual begins with the first movement, moving through each successively and then back again if necessary. Although a value of good or bad is not placed on particular content, the goal is to bring about a "felt shift," or experience of change.

Gendlin does not believe that experiencing in this way brings absolute truth. Instead, the process of Focusing is constantly changing, with each felt sense unfolding into the next and bringing a renewed sense of truth each time it does (1996). Gendlin sometimes uses the terms "felt meaning" and "felt sense" interchangeably, exemplifying the way in which, "every situation we are in always has implicit meaning for us, which we can actually sense in our body" (Welwood, 2000, p. 66). For the purposes of this dissertation, the term "felt sense," as oppose to "felt meaning," is used. Implicit in this term is the understanding that meaning may be imbued and intertwined in this unformed, yet internally felt experience.

Because this dissertation will refer to and make comparisons with Gendlin's model, it is worth clarifying some specific characteristics of the felt sense. The first is that, there is a distinction between a felt sense and an emotion. Although Gendlin (1996) asserts that the two are similar, they are not the same. An emotion, in contrast to a felt sense, is recognizable and, although a felt sense

has a rich and intricate meaning, it is generally more complex and difficult to express than an emotion. Additionally, an emotion tends to be a reaction and, as such, less reliable than reason in a given situation. A felt sense, however, usually includes myriad aspects of any given situation and is often more reliable than mere reason in any given moment (Gendlin, 1996).

Another difference is that a felt sense is grounded in the body and often contains emotions within it. Although an emotion may be felt intensely, Gendlin (1996) asserts that it does not unfold and reveal itself in new ways as a felt sense does. An emotion tends to be felt fully and at once, very different from a felt sense which often needs a space of silence before it emerges and can be attended to.

Gendlin also makes a distinction between a felt sense and "usual bodily sensation," which is but one category of how experience is often divided. In contrast to the usual definition in which bodily sensation refers only to physical and bodily sensations, a felt sense may "cross the lines between thought, feeling, desire, image, and sheer body sensation" (Gendlin, 1996, p. 19). Unlike body sensations which are usually felt as something which is already there, "a felt sense must first be allowed to come…It *comes* [sic] freshly, in something like the way tearfulness or yawning *come* [sic] in us" (Gendlin, 1996, p. 20). Gendlin also points out that physical sensations tend to be experienced on the periphery of the body, whereas a felt sense is more often experienced inwardly (1996).

For Gendlin, Focusing is not merely about identifying a felt sense, but also about being with it in such a way as to bring about a felt shift. Bringing about this

shift requires being able to find words that refer to the felt sense, a step in the process known as finding a "handle." In Focusing, the ability to find the right handle, brings about, "a feeling of physical relief, a bodily indication that what was said, or recognized, is directly meaningful as it emerges from the murky sense" (Gendlin, 1996, p. 26). In this way, putting words to the process is an integral part of the type of experiencing that Gendlin is interested in.

Leslie Greenberg and Jeremy Safran were students of Gendlin's and themselves went on to make significant contributions to psychotherapy process research. A brief note will be made about their work because of its importance in this research area, and also in the ways in which it is distinct from Gendlin's Focusing model.

Like Gendlin, Greenberg and Safran's (1987) process model is very much derived from, and intended for, a therapeutic context. Greenberg and Safran's primary focus, however, is on emotions and on explicating how working with emotions in therapy looks. Like Gendlin, Greenberg and Safran's (1987, 2002) model also emphasizes awareness of a felt sense, being slightly removed from particularly intense emotions, and articulation of experiencing; however, the focus is on a form of awareness and inquiry into emotions themselves, versus the development of the felt sense.

The process of inquiry or "empathic coaching" in Greenberg and Safran's model is not so different from Focusing in a general sense; however, the steps revolve around bringing awareness to the experiencing of emotions with the

intended outcome being a deeper awareness and understanding of maladaptive emotions and the integration of healthier emotional processes (1987, 2002).

Subjective experiencing: A psychospiritual perspective.

In contrast to Gendlin and Greenberg and Safran's research in the psychological domain, there have been relatively few empirical studies, or "process" research, examining subjective experiencing from a psychospiritual perspective. This may be for a variety of reasons, one of which is the history of how research has been conceptualized in the transpersonal literature.

On the most basic level, the way in which subjective experiencing has been conceptualized through a psychospiritual lens can be examined in one of two ways. The first has been in the study of so-called transpersonal experiences utilizing the methodologies already available within mainstream psychology. In this way, transpersonal research has used traditional methods to examine such phenomena as near-death experiences, spiritual emergencies, psychic phenomenon, abduction experience, and a variety of other transpersonal phenomena (Grof, 1996).

The second way in which psychospiritual research is seen is in its use of nontraditional methods to bring about nonordinary experiences. In this way, transpersonal psychology has systematically examined experiences brought about by the use of psychedelic substances, holotropic breathwork, rebirthing, hypnosis, primal therapy, biofeedback, and others (Grof, 1996).

In regards to a discussion of experience itself, what has been written is primarily theoretical in nature. This may be due in part to the connection between the psychospiritual framework and spiritual traditions, where teachings are often derived from personal experiences which lay the foundation for what is passed on, usually in oral form, from teacher to student. In spirituality, particularly the Asian spiritual traditions, the use of empiricism to study experiential phenomena is contained solely in the edict to realize for oneself, through practice, whether the teachings are true or not.

There have been spiritual and transpersonal teachers and authors, who through the language they use and audience they address, offer exemplary psychospiritual models of experiencing, integrating what is known in both the psychological and spiritual domains. For the purposes of this dissertation I will briefly focus on the writings of transpersonal theorist and clinician John Welwood. There are many researchers, clinicians, and theorists who have contributed to this area, several of whom I will refer to in the following sections. I choose to highlight the work of Welwood, however, because the terminology he uses and his model for psychospiritual development and experiencing is an especially eloquent integration of psychology and spirituality, and provide an excellent foundation for framing nondual experience as it is used in this dissertation. Furthermore, Welwood's work offers a distinct argument for how subjective experience that includes the transpersonal dimension is different from Gendlin's model, a distinction that will be explored further in the integrated discussion of the literature.

John Welwood and the unfolding of experience.

As a student of Gendlin's and practitioner of Buddhism and Eastern contemplative practices, Welwood's (2000) emphasis on experiencing is grounded in his findings that healing and transformation require an ability to be present with whatever experience is occurring, exactly as it is. Welwood (2000) states,

> Whenever we work on ourselves with a particular outcome or fix in mind, or strive to get somewhere different from where we are, we cut ourselves off from the immediacy of being—which is the only true agent of healing and transformation that there is. (p. 133)

Welwood goes on to say that this "fix-it mentality" only really works as an approach to external problems, but when it comes to approaching the subtleties of our inner being, this mentality tends to cause more problems than it solves. Welwood (2000) does not claim that psychospiritual approaches are free from this goal oriented tendency, but he does seem to suggest that psychospiritual approaches hold more promise in not mediating experience. If anything, Welwood offers a very clear description of how spiritual traditions approach subjective experience in contrast to psychological ones.

He states that, in its approach to internally felt subjective experience, psychological work tends to involve a "stepping back from felt experience in order to inquire into it in a dialogical manner" (Welwood, 2000, p. 99). In this way, the experience is meant to open up, revealing hidden felt meanings which shift, thus leading to important cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes (Welwood, 2000).

In contrast, the spiritual traditions, in particular that of Tibetan Buddhism (Mahamudra/Dzogchen), take a different approach to felt experience. Instead of standing away from experience, spiritual methods encourage a more radical opening to experience just as it is (Welwood, 2000). By being with experience in this way, more sudden kinds of revelation might emerge. These are described variously in terms of "*transmutation, self-liberation,* or *spontaneous presence* [sic]" (p. 99). Although subtle, this is an extremely important distinction, and one that is relevant to the study of nondual consciousness. The reason for this, Welwood argues, is that by working with felt experience in the slightly removed manner common to modern psychology, an inner division is retained, which from the perspective of most spiritual traditions contributes to the very split which is the root of suffering in the first place; "'me'" versus 'my experience'" (p. 101). In mainstream psychology, clients are taught to manage, understand, and ultimately reduce the distress that arises out of identification with a separate ego-self, but rarely to question the fundamental existence of this internal division or the conditions that give rise to it in the first place (Welwood, 2000). From a psychospiritual perspective, spiritual teacher, author, and psychotherapist Dorothy Hunt (2003) suggests that this split pulls us out of experience itself. "To experience something directly is not to discharge it, deny it, act it out, redirect it, repress it, represent it, judge it, analyze it, make commentary about it, or 'understand' it with the mind" (Hunt, 2003, pp. 160-161). Hunt (2003) goes on to say that when experience is fully and directly experienced in this way, it is always transformative.

In his conceptualization of subjective experience, Welwood believes that there is a natural unfolding process to experience, in which things that have been hidden emerge into consciousness, and human and spiritual development unfolds in both horizontal and vertical ways. Psychospiritual unfolding, for Welwood, is a process of both making implicit felt meaning explicit (i.e., horizontal shifts), and of experiencing the unfolding of ones being into its true nature as when we suddenly shift from the realm of the self or personality to the realm of pure being (i.e., vertical shifts) (2000). Welwood (2000) suggests that in any process of inquiry or being with experience, there are three levels of reflection: conceptual, phenomenological, and "mindful witnessing" (p. 107).

Conceptual reflection refers to the way in which we most commonly begin to reflect on our experience, namely by thinking about it and using our discursive mind to understand and analyze it. Most psychological and spiritual traditions tend to begin with this level of reflection first (Welwood, 2000). The second level of reflection is phenomenological. This is a more refined approach in which the space between observer and observed narrows and conceptual assumptions are put aside. "Here the observing consciousness stays close to felt experience, inquiring into it gently, and waiting patiently for responses and insights to come directly from there, rather than from some cognitive schema" (Welwood, 2000, p. 109). In this way, experiencing itself is the guide and reveals itself as it is attended to. The third level of reflection is "reflective witnessing," an even subtler form of reflection in which "one is simply attentive to the ongoing flow of the

mindstream, without concern about particular contents of experience that arise" (Welwood, 2000, pp. 109-110).

Welwood goes on to make an even more subtle distinction between all the levels of reflection and "pure presence" itself, in which there is a coming into total alignment with experiencing, " through overcoming all struggle with it, through discovering and abiding in the deep, silent source from which all experience arises" (Welwood, 2000, p. 111).

These levels of reflection, and especially Welwood's description of pure presence, point to one of the fundamental elements of a psychospiritual approach to subjective experiencing: namely, the emphasis on unconditioned experience in which identification with a separate ego-self dissolves, often referred to as nondual consciousness.

Spiritual teacher and author A. Hameed Ali, commonly known by his penname A. H. Almaas, like Welwood, conceptualizes experiencing as an unfolding process. Almaas (Ali, 2002) states,

> A human being is a universe of experience, multifaceted and multidimensional. Each of us is a soul, a dynamic consciousness, a magical organ of experience and action. And each of us is in a constant state of transformation—of one experience opening up to another, one action leading to another, one perception multiplying into many others; of perception growing into knowledge, knowledge leading to action, and action creating more experience. This unfolding is constant, dynamic, and full of energy. This is the very nature of what we call life. (p. 5)

Welwood's conceptualization of experiencing also includes a discussion of different forms of attention, which are the ways in which we consciously attend to experience, as well as different grounds from which experience emerges. For Welwood, unconscious and conscious processes are not separate regions of the

psyche and are primarily distinguished by the form of attention with which they are experienced (2000). “Unconscious process may be nonlinear, but it is not inherently dark or unknowable. It is only unknowable through focal attention” (Welwood, 2000, p. 64). Welwood points to another type of attention that he calls “diffuse attention,” in which an entire field is experienced at once, without linear analysis. Diffuse attention is expressed most fully in nondual experience, although often not given much attention to in ordinary consciousness. Welwood (2000) believes that diffuse attention is also what is used in Focusing as a means of attending to a felt sense.

Inquiry

Like Gendlin’s Focusing in the psychological domain, the practice of inquiry in its various forms is often referred to in the psychospiritual and spiritual literature as a means by which constructed identity is disentangled and nondual consciousness can be realized.

Inquiry in the psychospiritual literature.

Almaas (Ali, 2008) describes inquiry as a way in which “we attend to and explore any process that is naturally occurring. When we are aware of our experience, consciously engaging it, and inviting its unfoldment through our immediate presence, that is inquiry” (p. 43). The term “inquiry” itself implies an exploration or investigation, however, from the perspective of some psychospiritual approaches, such as Almaas’ Diamond Approach, for example, it

is the desire, the wanting, the curiosity to know what is unknown that fuels whatever unfoldment arises out of consciousness (Ali, 2002). In this way, inquiry is the practice, and understanding is the outcome. Understanding in this context is not merely intellectual, but also includes heart, body, and intuition, and requires full presence with immediate experience (Davis, 1999).

Inquiry is not free association nor is it a form of mindfulness meditation, but it is rather a means of following a particular internal thread, often initiated by a specific question or experience, and being with its unfoldment (Ali, 2002; Davis, 1999).

Contemporary spiritual teacher and author Adyashanti [born as Stephen Gray], whose teachings draw on Zen Buddhist philosophy, suggests that the questioning inherent in any form of inquiry, must originate from a place of deep care and sincerity and that when it does, inquiry draws you back to yourself, back to the heart of experience itself (2003). Almaas (Ali) uses the term "truth" in describing the internal thread that is to be followed, and suggests that truth is, "something that gives meaning or coherence to what is happening…It's not only a mental explanation but a felt sense of it being experientially meaningful to us. It makes sense to our heart, to our soul" (2008, p. 15).

Almaas (Ali) suggests that there are two basic elements to inquiry. The first is in simply observing and becoming aware of one's actual experience. The second is in inquiring into what is making the experience happen.

> Thus our practice is to just be aware of and present with whatever is arising, to let it be and not do anything to it except allow our natural curiosity to unfold it and reveal what it is about…When I say "aware and present," I am saying, "present to what you are aware of," which means

> that you are not only noticing it, but you are also in contact with it; you are touching it, feeling it, sensing its texture and quality. You are not only looking at it from the outside, you are aware of it from the inside as well and from all directions, from everywhere. (2008, p. 33)

In this process, experience may take on myriad forms including awareness of memories and associations, physical sensations, thoughts and emotions, intuitions, and energetic qualities (Davis, 1999). This approach to experience as something to be inquired into from the inside points again to the difference, suggested by Welwood as well, between spiritual and psychological approaches that take a more removed stance to experience. Almaas believes, much like Welwood, that this removed stance creates an inner division. In Almaas' view this inner division, generally experienced as a resistance to particular experience, is the nature of our conditioned identity. Of course, from a spiritual perspective, the complete falling away of resistance will eventually contribute to total dissolution of the conditioned ego.

From the perspective of most contemporary spiritual teachers (Adyashanti, Almaas, Gangaji, Welwood) inquiry is about delving into whatever is happening in one's awareness, including resistance itself, and experiencing it fully. "Inquiry does not necessarily mean you have to do something or ask a specific question. It is more like observing with curiosity" (Ali, 2008, p. 41). From this approach, it is one's attitude and willingness to be with experience that is most important. Inquiry, however, does not merely mean letting experience happen as is while one stands by as a witness; but it implies a sincere willingness to truly *experience* what is happening as it is. The curiosity or questioning in any inquiry process serves to draw one deeper into abiding with experience itself.

> When inquiry is authentic, it brings you into the experience of here and now, bringing you to the full depth of it, pulling you into it. The question pulls you back into the mystery of your experience…The answer does not come in the form of a description or phrase; it is a direct experience. (Gray, 2007, parag. 7)

Almaas (Ali) emphasizes that, although inquiry often leads to an experiential shift, it is a continually unfolding process with no stated goal (2002). This is a very important distinction especially in contrast to psychological approaches, which are almost always imbued with an intended outcome in mind. As Almaas (Ali) states, "the process has to be open-ended in every way: in terms of how you go about it, what you inquire into, and where the journey takes you. Every limitation has to be challenged, or at least you have to be willing to challenge it" (2002, p. 27). As such, there is no correct way in which to inquire, in fact anything at all can be the catalyst for inquiry, given an open-ended attitude of sincerity and a willingness to encounter and be with any experience at all, from the most extraordinary to the most sublime (Ali, 2002; Davis, 1999).

In addition to a particular attitude and willingness, inquiry also requires an acceptance of not knowing and an ability to hold whatever experiences arise with a spacious and nonjudgmental attitude (Ali, 2002). Any judgment or holding on or inner division will only serve to stymie the natural unfolding of the process and separate one from his or her experience.

Inquiry in the spiritual literature.

Inquiry practices referred to by contemporary psychospiritual authors such as A. H. Almaas, John Welwood, Adyashanti, and Dorothy Hunt have their roots

in practices within the spiritual traditions intended towards deconstruction of conditioned ego and a realization of one's true nature.

Buddhism and Hinduism both contain techniques for "deconstruction" (Forman, 1998) intended to guide the practitioner towards a state of being in which conceptual bifurcation between subject and object is dissolved (Dillon, 1998). Although these traditions each conceive of the goal of deconstructive processes somewhat differently (i.e., no-self in Buddhism versus self-transcendence in Hinduism), the state of awareness they describe is qualitatively nondual in nature. An examination of these processes suggests that their aim of freeing up one's identification with the world is accomplished through various processes of inquiry in which entanglements and identifications are questioned and eventually seen through to reveal one's true nature.

The great twentieth century Indian sage, Ramana Maharshi [born as Venkataraman Iyer] suggests that rather than meditation which requires an object upon which to fixate, it is through inquiry *(vichara)* into the experience of self that realization is attained. "Vichara is the process and the goal also. 'I am' is the goal and the final reality. To hold to it with effort is vichara. When spontaneous and natural it is realization" (as cited in Katz, 2007, p. 34). Maharshi (Iyer, 2004) further suggests that when the question, "Who am I?" is asked within one's mind with sincerity and true surrender to the answers that come, not from the mind, but from a deeper source, "the thought 'Who am I?' will destroy all other thoughts, and, like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then there will arise Self-realization" (Iyer, 2004, p. 5). It should be

noted that the surrender to which Maharshi (Iyer) refers is a very profound surrender.

> Surrender can take effect only when it is done with the full knowledge as to what real surrender means… This destruction of the ego, this loss of individuality—a state in which attachment to the non-Self does not find a foothold—is self-surrender. (p. 39)

Despite the frequency with which inquiry is offered as a means towards nondual realization, to truly inquire and surrender for most people is an enormously challenging task (Katz, 2007).

In the nondual wisdom traditions of Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, Dzogchen/Mahamudra, and Advaita Vedanta, various forms of inquiry are used to untangle what appears as substantial reality eventually revealing the emptiness or insubstantiality that lies at the core (Bodian, 2003). In each of these, inquiry is used like a microscope or magnifier, aimed and precisely focused on a particular area of oneself, penetrating the apparent sense of a constructed self and its associated feelings and thoughts (Bodian, 2003). Judith Blackstone (2005) states that, although the deconstruction techniques offered by Asian nondual philosophy can be effective complements to psychotherapeutic techniques, even more so, these techniques offer a way of understanding

> the shift that occurs in one's experience of both one's self and one's relationships as deconstruction progresses. This shift is seen as a gradual freedom from one's own hermetically organized world, and an opening to or availability for the mutual world of self and other. (p. x)

Asian nondual philosophy is somewhat split along two lines in regards to deconstructive processes. One school of thought would suggest that deconstruction is the goal of spiritual practice itself, while the other maintains that

a more innate dimension of being and knowing is in fact revealed in the process of, and as a result of deconstruction (Loy, 1998). In some ways, this distinction reveals one of the many paradoxes inherent in nonduality and seems to be reconciled by such statements as Maharshi's when he points to inquiry as both the "process and the goal" (as cited in Katz, 2007, p. 34).

Transpersonal author and clinician John Prendergast (2003) further articulates this point in stating that, when there is an awakening of nondual consciousness, the depth and transformative power of inquiry itself is enhanced. Thus, we might argue that true inquiry is both the means and the result, and that whether we align with the notion of deconstruction as a process or a result, much like traveling East or West to circumambulate the globe, in the end, we arrive at the same point.

The Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness

A review of the psychological literature related to nondual consciousness.

Within the field of psychology, the most significant literature about nondual consciousness and realization has been in research from the psychology of religion on mysticism and conversion experiences which, in regards to detailing qualitative experience, rely heavily on the accounts of ancient teachers and mystics, but not as much on present-day accounts (Paul, 2008). A few recent studies in the field of neuropsychology have attempted to find neural correlates for nondual experience (Josipovic, 2005; Wallace, 2007). Additionally, several

dissertations have explored aspects of nondual consciousness by focusing on the topic of awakened psychotherapists (Butlein, 2005), the relevance of nondual realization on psychotherapy (Blackstone, 2005), the development of a grounded theory of awakening/realization (Paul, 2008), the nature and evolution of consciousness as related to the theoretical work of theorists Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn (Khalsa, 2008), and the lived experiences of purportedly enlightened spiritual teachers (Costeines, 2009). Among these, the work of Butlein (2005), Paul (2008), Khalsa (2008), and Costeines (2009) are investigations of nondual consciousness which actually draw on interview data with present-day participants.

David Butlein (2005), in his study on awakening and psychotherapy, collected quantitative and qualitative data from 15 transpersonal, nontranspersonal, and purportedly awakened psychotherapists, examining the differences in personality traits, therapeutic worldview, and client reports among them. Butlein (2005) found that, among the purportedly awakened psychotherapists, several extraordinary characteristics emerged which distinguished them from the other therapists. These characteristics, summarized in the following themes, were: mental clarity, vibration evocation, nonduality, spacious presence, heartful/mindful contact, and deep empathy. Butlein (2005) further found that these characteristics contributed to a decrease in therapists' defensiveness and countertransference and increased openness, empathic attunement, and client-therapist connection. In Butlein's (2005) work, nonduality was defined as an "embodied sense of oneness that results from the dissolving of

personal boundaries which leaves no separation between oneself and the world, or between subject and object" (p. 124). Butlein's work offers an important contribution to research, particularly in illuminating the therapeutic benefits of nondual consciousness to therapy.

Arvin Paul (2008), in his work, took a grounded theory approach to examining the process of awakening or realization among individuals in which awakening had occurred through a direct or top-down approach. By analyzing archival data from 20 participants, conducting interviews with 9 more, and administering a questionnaire to an additional 40 participants, Paul (2008) developed a theory of awakening that was grounded in the participant's perspectives of self and personality, their understanding of the primary sources of psychological suffering, and the stages and elements of the awakening process. Data from Paul's (2008) study also revealed some of the elements of relationship in the awakening process, and offered some applications and supports for the unfolding of the process. Paul's (2008) study is of considerable importance to this dissertation in that it is one of the few that has attempted to describe in more depth the experience of nondual consciousness as it has been lived. Further, Paul (2008) gathered his data in multiple ways, not defining his inquiry to the experience of nondual consciousness or awakening as it is related to psychotherapy. Paul (personal communication, May 10, 2009) suggests that there is still a need for more descriptive accounts of nondual consciousness itself in order to better understand the findings in his and others work.

In his dissertation on spiritual development, Puran Khalsa (2008) interviewed 9 spiritual teachers from three different spiritual traditions identifying patterns and comparing these findings to the theoretical models of the development of consciousness presented by Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn. In his study, Khalsa (2008) found that the spiritual development of participants support certain aspects of both Wilber and Washburn's models and differed in other ways. In particular, Khalsa (2008) explored "the context surrounding spiritual development, potential difficulties, and significant influences pertaining to each personal journey." In his study, Khalsa (2008) identified several themes common to all participants' narratives of their spiritual development. These themes, as labeled by Khalsa, included: awakening, guidance and external influence, source of difficulty, self-concept, and incorporating into liberation. Nondual consciousness in Khalsa's (2008) study was discussed and described as expressed by participants themselves in comparison to Wilber and Washburn's conceptualizations of nondual consciousness. As expressed by Khalsa (2008), the relevance of his study is in its contribution to a greater understanding of the potential issues of transpersonal development in contemporary spiritual practitioners, and in offering guideposts to clinicians working with clients in regards to spiritual issues.

In his dissertation examining the lived experiences of purportedly enlightened spiritual teachers, Michael Costeines (2009) interviewed 16 participants, all of whom were teachers of nondual mysticism, in an effort to define the essential qualities of nondual consciousness. In Costeines' (2009)

study, nondual consciousness was theorized to be the highest level of psychospiritual development, known in the nondual mystical traditions as "enlightenment." Costeines' (2009) study revealed several key themes that described participants' process of nondual realization as a gradual transition from egoic consciousness to nondual consciousness. Within this process, stable traits associated with mature nondual consciousness were identified which included: nondual ontology, disidentification from mental constructs, timeless awareness, mental lucidity, nondual action, beatific peace, spontaneous joy, absence of neurotic suffering, unitive relationships, unitive love, awareness of spiritual immortality, and awareness of positive cosmology. Costeines' (2009) study was especially strong in that a fairly large number of participants were interviewed as compared with other studies, and that the focus was primarily on the lived experience of nondual consciousness, in and of itself as experienced by participants over the course of their lives and presently.

Other related studies have examined facets of experience that appear to share characteristics of nondual consciousness, but may or may not be referring to the same phenomenon, or may be referring to just one aspect of nondual consciousness. These include a dissertation exploring William James and Kitaro Nishida's shared concept of "pure experience" (Krueger, 2008); a dissertation studying the phenomenology of psychotherapists' transpersonal embodied experiences in the therapeutic relationship (Macecevic, 2008); a theoretical dissertation examining human development based on the performance of nonduality (Cook, 2004); a dissertation which explores the question of awareness

from a nondual perspective (Brock, 1994); a dissertation looking at the process of opening to experiencing of mystical knowledge (Rickard, 2008); and the exploration of intuition (Benford, 1997; Petitmengin, 1999, 2007).

In addition to these studies several books have been published in recent years that contain transcribed interviews with persons who identify themselves as spiritually awake and embody some of the descriptive characteristics of nondual consciousness (Gill, 2004; Fenner, & Krystal, 2003; Kersschot, 2004; Lumiere & Lumiere-Wins, 2003; Marvelly, 2002; Parker, 2000; Prendergast & Bradford, 2007; Prendergast & Thompson, 2002; Valine, 2005). Finally, there are the myriad oral and written teachings of spiritually realized teachers of contemporary nondualism, most of which refer to their own personal experiences of nondual consciousness and realization.

In general, information regarding nondual consciousness within the field of psychology has been predominately theoretical in nature, and qualitative explorations into the experiential nuances of nondual consciousness itself are rare. At the same time, there has been a great deal of research identifying the empirical reality of nonordinary experiences, many of which include descriptions of nondual consciousness, that fall outside the domain of conventional psychologies and psychotherapies (Paul, 2008). The fact that relatively little qualitative research in this area exists in the psychological domain may be surprising given the finding that, within the field of psychotherapy, glimpses of nondual consciousness are common among therapists in their heightened attunement to the present moment and in their capacity for empathy, integration of compassion and

wisdom, and in the intimacy and depth of their human interaction (Blackstone, 2005). Judith Blackstone (2005), who presents these findings in her dissertation on the relevancy of nondual realization for psychotherapists, defines nonduality as, "the experience of one's own being as all-pervasive, unified consciousness" (p. xxv). In her work, Blackstone (2005) does differentiate between nondual experience and nondual realization as a more stable, lasting transformation, versus an isolated "peak experience," a distinction that will be further explored in this dissertation.

In regards to what is found in the psychological literature, most of which is in transpersonal psychology, most of the theorists who have written about nondual consciousness have done so in the context of human development and transformation. The most well known of these is probably Ken Wilber, who has written extensively on the subject of psychological and spiritual development (1979, 1980, 2000). According to Wilber (1980, 2000), human development can be conceptualized as falling on a continuum in which individuals pass through sequential stages towards nondual or "unity" consciousness. In Wilber's model, development is a more or less linear process and certain practices or aspects of being tend to be compartmentalized, such as the somatic, psychological, and nondual aspects of being (1980, 2000). Although linear, development, according to Wilber, does not necessarily progress at the same rate or in the same way along each aspect of being. Nondual consciousness, according to Wilber (2000), can manifest as either a "state" (in which it may show up at any level of development) or a "structure," in which it has developed into a more permanent way of being.

As a structure (Wilber uses the terms "level" or "wave"), Wilber suggests that it is a rarefied condition which is the pinnacle of human development and self-realization. As a state, Wilber includes it alongside psychic, subtle, and causal states as a higher level, or transpersonal, state (2000).

Although Wilber has developed an extremely detailed and comprehensive model of development, based on the writings of hundreds of psychological and spiritual systems, the finding remains that nondual states of consciousness are not rare, as his model suggests. In fact, the appearance of nondual experiences is presenting new challenges and opportunities for the field of psychology (Prendergast, 2003, 2007; Gray, 2008). This apparent paradox between theoretical discussions of nondual consciousness and anecdotal findings in the psychological literature is one of many.

It is of course worth noting that several other theorists have offered their own descriptions of spiritual development, which also include reference to nondual consciousness and realization. In contrast to Wilber, A. H. Almaas' model does not assert that development is a linear process with psychological development being a prerequisite for spiritual development. Instead, Almaas argues that the release of psychological barriers can be done in conjunction with spiritual development while still moving towards nondual realization. In Almaas' (Ali) words, "essence" (1986, 1988), or "living daylight" (1988) is the nondual dimension of consciousness.

Like Almaas, John Welwood (Lecture, March 15, 2009) also argues that the "ground" of who we are, characterized at times by nondual consciousness, can

be accessed only when we attend to both psychological and spiritual aspects of being, which can be done together. According to Welwood (Lecture, March 15, 2009), connecting with one's "lifestream," which is the expression of the ground as our personal being, is to connect with that which underlies our very being. Similarly, theorist Michael Washburn (1995) believes that the "Ground" as he calls it, is an inherent aspect of human nature which is not only the catalyst, but also the goal of human evolution. In contrast to Wilber, however, Washburn (1995) also believes that mind-body integration happens concurrently with the realization of the Ground. Subtle disagreements such as these, about the potential for, and actuality of nondual consciousness, are but another reason to explore this phenomenon.

Furthermore, the development of methods for achieving or integrating nondual wisdom into psychotherapy is a relatively new area of exploration. One of the reasons for this, in addition to the elusive nature of nonduality itself, may also be in the lack of a comprehensive definition of what it is that the term "nondual" or its synonyms are really referring to. For example, it is not entirely clear if terms used by transpersonal theorists, such as "essence," "living daylight," "Ground," and "pure presence," are also synonyms for nondual consciousness or even for each other. Further, many terms have been used to refer to what could be described as the full evolution of consciousness, which is sometimes referred to as nondual-realization, -consciousness, or -awareness. These include, "self-knowledge, witness consciousness, no-mind, primordial mind, reality, openness, pure awareness, Buddha-nature, and the unconditioned mind" (Fenner, 2003, p.

27). To further examine the felt experience of nondual consciousness may help disambiguate some of these terms.

Additionally, based on theoretical disagreements in both the psychological and spiritual literature, it is unclear exactly what phenomenon is being referred to as nondual consciousness. For example, Robert Forman (1998), who has written extensively on the topic of mysticism, distinguishes between three different types of phenomenal experience which relate to nondual consciousness. The first of these, which Forman (1998) calls a pure consciousness event (PCE) describes a temporary event in which one's consciousness is completely free of all thoughts or perceptions of mental and sensory content although there remains a sense of wakefulness. Forman (1998) separates the PCE from two other types of phenomena in which there "is a deep shift in epistemological structure" (p. 186) in which "the experienced relationship between the self and one's perceptual objects changes profoundly" (p. 186). The first of these Forman (1998) calls a dualistic mystical state (DMS) and he describes it as,

> an experience of a permanent interior stillness, even while engaged in thought and activity—one remains aware of one's own awareness while simultaneously remaining conscious of thoughts, sensations and actions. Because of its phenomenological dualism—a heightened cognizance of awareness itself plus a consciousness of thoughts and objects—I call it the dualistic mystical state (DMS). (p. 186)

The second type of phenomenon Forman (1998) calls a unitive mystical state (UMS) and describes it as "a perceived unity of one's own awareness *per se* [sic] with the objects around one, an immediate sense of a quasi-physical unity between self, objects and other people" (p. 186). Although the aim of this dissertation is not to define "nonduality," by investigating the felt experience of

nondual consciousness, we may deepen and clarify our understanding of this phenomenon as it has already been discussed.

Finally, it has been suggested that the capacity for nondual consciousness is in and of itself beneficial for several reasons, and this alone may be reason to further study this unique phenomenon. Although theoretical discussions would suggest that nondual consciousness is essentially without qualities (Prendergast, 2003), the detailed descriptions offered about this state of consciousness suggest that this is just one more of the many paradoxes which emerge in any discussion of nonduality. For one, many people report such consciousness as spacious and heartfelt, and completely present-centered, as well as experiencing feelings of love, compassion, gratitude, and a heightened sense of interconnectedness (Prendergast, 2003). Blackstone (2005) makes the point that people report a feeling of great joy in experiencing the immediacy of perception, as is common in nondual consciousness. Further, Peter Fenner (2003), who writes about nonduality and therapy, suggests that nondual consciousness has a healing effect on the whole person.

> No matter what our physical and mental conditions might be, we aren't limited by them. This is not a state of denial. If anything, we are more aware of our circumstances. But we don't relate to them as "something that shouldn't be happening." When we rest in the unconditioned mind we are in total harmony with ourselves and the world. We are at home with ourselves in a totally effortless and uncontrived way. (Fenner, 2003, p. 31)

Fenner (2003) argues that, whether we know it or not, nondual consciousness or, "the unconditioned mind" as he terms it, is the ultimate goal for all human actions for the basic reason that, from this state of being, nothing else is required or sought out. From this state of consciousness we experience a total freedom even

in the midst of conditioned experience. Furthermore, psychotherapist John Prendergast (2003) writes, that when nondual consciousness can be engaged, without any effort, “an optimal field of loving acceptance arises that facilitates transformation” (p. 8).

In all, the wisdom of nondual teachings contributes to the contemporary philosophical discourse regarding subjectivity, consciousness and the potential for human growth (Blackstone, 2005). A more specific examination into the felt experience of nondual consciousness itself may serve to enrich these and future discussions regarding this important phenomenon.

Describing nonduality.

Derived from the Sanskrit word *advaita*, literally meaning “not-two,” nonduality is a rather curious word, and as a state or experience of consciousness, an enormously challenging one to put into words.

Historically, this understanding of not-two, or no-separateness, is at the root of Hindu Vedanta, Taoism, most schools of Buddhism, and the mystical schools of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Prendergast, 2003). These traditions teach that

> there is no intrinsic separation between subject and object, experiencer and experienced, God and creation, consciousness and its manifestations. The apparently separate and substantial self does not exist except as a constantly changing constellation of thoughts, feelings, images, memories, and sensations…consciousness and its object are one. (Bodian, 2003, pp. 233-234)

John Prendergast (2003) writes that nondual wisdom points to not only the understanding, but also the direct experience of a consciousness that underlies any

apparent distinction between that which is perceived and the perceiver. Prendergast (2003) goes on to say that, "From the nondual perspective, the split between self and other is a purely mental construct…[nonduality] is a word that points to that which is before and beyond the projections of a separate, self-reflexive mind" (p. 2).

Whether a single comprehensive definition for nondual consciousness can be developed, the descriptions of this phenomenon, regardless of the name given to it, are recognizably the same among traditions around the world. Interpretations of these experiences and their significance about the nature of the universe, however, vary across these traditions (Forman, 1998). Although neural correlates related to nondual consciousness are being investigated (see Josipovic, 2005, and Wallace, 2007), the most persuasive empirical evidence for these states of consciousness is still through the first-hand accounts of nondual consciousness as it has been lived (Blackstone, 2005, 2007). These accounts suggest that even though the undifferentiation of subject and object may be ineffable, the experience is unmistakable.

The issue of language.

One of the inherent challenges in any discussion of nonduality is the issue of language. As Peter Fenner (2003) so aptly states, "If we speak from *within* [sic] an experience of the unconditioned mind *about* [sic] the unconditioned mind, paradoxes can flow forth as joyful and exuberant expression of mental energy that is usually trapped by the need to appear sane and sensible" (p. 53). To discuss or

try to define nondual consciousness, or to speak of or from a nondual "perspective," is inevitably a dualistic endeavor for by attempting to define or speak *about* a phenomenon, we are immediately placed alongside and distinctly separate from it (Katz, 2007). To write about nonduality puts us in a similar bind.

Even so, a long and important history exists within the spiritual traditions in which learned teachers have offered their wisdom, through their words and actions, on the most subtle aspects of being. Even though words may not themselves contain the experience which we describe, words can serve as pointers to subtle and ineffable experiences. Although some would argue that nondual consciousness can simply not be spoken about, few would debate the value of teachings that have been offered by the world's preeminent teachers on just this topic. Words have their limitations, yet they may still offer new insights into an important dialogue. Just as the Zen parable instructs us not to mistake the finger pointing to the moon for the moon itself, neither should these words be mistaken for the experiences they attempt to describe.

In many ways, nonduality is best understood as a negation to a particular duality (Loy, 1998), and so this discussion includes references to nondual characteristics as well as references to what nonduality is not. In this regard, the following quote by John Prendergast (2003) illuminates the continual paradoxes of articulating nonduality which seem inevitable for any discussion on this topic.

> By its nature, that which is nondual is undivided and nonconceptual. The conceptual mind can never nail it down. It is not limited by a set of principles since it is the source of all principles. Nor can it be confined to any particular set of practices, since reality uses all tools at is disposal at any given moment, including death, disease, pain, shock, and suffering, to point us to our true nature. Nonduality can never be confined by any

> philosophy or psychospiritual practice, although such practices may play a vital role in preparing the ground for awakening or facilitating a glimpse of our true nature. It is not limited to any object or subtle state of consciousness, even as it includes these. It is both no-thing and everything, empty yet full of pure potentiality. It is immanent and transcendent, formed and formless. And it is none of these. It is *what is* [sic] and *what we are* [sic] and little more of any meaning can be said about it. Mainly we can describe what it is not, and even that in time will be seen to be untrue. (Prendergast, 2003, p. 4)

The nature of ego.

In the context of human experience, dualism most generally refers to the way in which internal (mind) and external (world), or consciousness and its object, are experienced as separate (Loy, 1998). It is in the ongoing reification of the internal world, which we define as "I," that we come to feel increasingly separate and disconnected from external phenomena. Our motivation for constantly (and usually unconsciously) solidifying this sense of "I" is in an attempt to ensure some sort of stability or permanence of who we are. "The dualistic ego-mind is essentially a survival mechanism…By maintaining a separate self-sense, it attempts to provide a haven of security in an impermanent world marked by continual change, unpredictability, and loss" (Welwood, 2003, p. 139). By relating to the world via this "I," there is a sense of familiarity and seeming predictability. In this way, we are provided with a "standpoint," or apparently secure ground from which to relate to ourselves and the world.

According to the Asian philosophical traditions, this system, also known as "ego" or "discursive mind" serves to protect one from a direct experience of emptiness (Bodian, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1987). Emptiness, according to Buddhist philosophy refers to the belief that, although phenomena are "real," objective

phenomena are empty of inherently independent existence. In fact, according to Asian philosophy, it is this reification between subject and object that is the root of human suffering (Blackstone, 2005).

> Most people's consciousness…remains restricted to a single plane of reality: dualistic perception, as fabricated by the conditioned egoic mind, which sets up a solid division between the separate self over here and everything else over there. All our main patterns of self-defense—repression, resistance, denial, avoidance, withdrawal, projection, judgment, rejection, dissociation, aggression—are ways of separating ourselves from reality, standing apart from it, and substituting a mind-created virtual reality in its place. This tendency to fabricate our own separate reality is a way of trying to protect ourselves against "other"—those elements of reality that appear alien or threatening. (Welwood, 2003, p. 139)

This system further implies that, whether we are aware of it or not, our world is based on projections and those projections become the basis for what we know of relationships (Krishnamurti, 1987). "Ego," in this context, is generally conceptualized as "that which holds the body, mind and consciousness together into an illusory sense of individual self," distinct from other animate and inanimate beings (Upadhyaya, 2006, p. 76). According to contemporary spiritual teacher Adyashanti (Gray, 2003, 2004), our most common experience of duality is in our ongoing way of relating to our experience in the world as something which we want to either hold on to or to change. Adyashanti (Gray, 2003) states that it is in this division that the "I" or "ego" maintains its identity. According to Adyashanti (Gray, 2003), ego is "that sense of self which takes itself to be separate and essentially self-existing or independently existing in and of itself, and all the commotion and internal chaos and division that that causes" (p. 70).

William James, the father of American psychology, himself alluded to the illusory nature of the ego or "I," and the experience of dualistic consciousness in his early writings. James made the point that whether or not experience is dualistic, there is no independent "I" generating or holding together this experience. According to James, all experience arises in a field of pure consciousness, whatever that experience might be (Bricklin, 2003). James asserted that there is a common confusion often made between the sense of consciousness which is so often associated with an "I," and the idea that this "I" should be credited with the experience itself. In fact, for James, the stream of consciousness made up of our thoughts and the spaces in between them, is what comes to create a sense of an "I," not the other way around. For James, consciousness implied a witnessing or knowing, which at times is a knowing of consciousness itself. In contrast to this type of *con*-sciousness (consciousness-with-self), James also described *scious*ness (consciousness-without-self). In the latter, the sense of self or "I" dissolves, although consciousness remains (Bricklin, 2003). James argued that this experience was not simply a reality, but was the *prime* reality (Bricklin, 2003).

Duality should not, however, be considered an entirely negative thing. As suggested by Indian nondual teachings, duality (*dvaita*) is in fact the vehicle by which nonduality (*advaita*) is realized (Welwood, 2003). As long as there is a turning away from anything, including duality, there is a pulling apart, a division from the present to somewhere else. This pulling apart is in fact an inward turning by which the constructed "I," in its reverberations, creates itself over and over

again (Bricklin, 2003). True nondual consciousness must include both duality and nonduality.

Multiple meanings of ego.

These descriptions, drawn from Buddhist and Hindu philosophy, should be distinguished from Freud's conceptualization of ego in his structural model of the psyche. The distinction between the two is in itself a significant discussion, which will not be explored here. Whether or not the term "ego" is pointing to the same phenomena in each school of thought is debatable. However, in the context of this discussion, it is worth noting that the importance given to what we define as ego is distinctly different. For those in the spiritual traditions, as noted, the idea of a stable and solid ego is an illusion which is in fact the source of suffering. From the Freudian perspective, ego is a self-organizing structure crucial to healthy personality development (Cohen, 2000). Whether or not the development and bolstering of the ego is a cause of suffering is not of particular interest in the psychoanalytic literature. To the extent that this literature speaks of nondual consciousness, psychoanalytic literature probably falls in the school of thought that says that a healthy ego is required before ego is dissolved, a perspective found in some psychospiritual literature as well.

Arguments about the nature of nondual consciousness.

There have been a variety of arguments within the Asian traditions about the nature and interpretation of nondual consciousness that arose within Hinduism

in India as well as Buddhism as it spread from India to Tibet, Burma, China, and Japan. These arguments are further reflected, among others, in the psychospiritual literature as well. Drawing on Judith Blackstone's (2005) distillation of these arguments as a particularly comprehensive and concise conceptualization of the major debates in this area, these debates include, (a) the question of whether or not the experience of nondual consciousness co-emerges with phenomena; (b) whether nondual realization is the realization of emptiness or the experience of an underlying unified dimension of consciousness; (c) whether nondual consciousness can actually be experienced or there is "no one there" to experience it at all; and (d) whether nondual realization occurs at once or is a gradual process over time. In examining the felt experience of nondual consciousness, it may be that additional questions should be added to this list, or that some clarity emerges in regards to these debates.

Nondual consciousness and the phenomenal world.

In regards to the first issue of nondual consciousness and phenomena as well as the second issue of whether nondual realization is a realization of emptiness or whether it is an experience of unified consciousness, both arguments appear to be of great subtlety and similarity to one another. Asian nondual philosophy, namely the Buddhist and Hindu traditions that describe nonduality most explicitly, generally defines three different ways in which consciousness recognizes itself. These are in parallel with Forman's (1998) description of mystical states previously outlined. The first is the temporary experience of

consciousness in which there is awakeness without thought, perceptions, or actions, the state which Forman (1998) refers to as a pure consciousness event (PCE) (Blackstone, 2005).

The second is the simultaneous experience of pure consciousness and objects in which all internal and external content are permeated with a unified expanse of luminous consciousness, in which consciousness is said to be self-knowing and self-recognizing (a “dualistic mystical state,” according to Forman) (Blackstone, 2005; Rabjam, 1998).

The third description, most commonly found in the teachings of Zen Buddhism, emphasizes the aspect of emptiness, in which objective phenomena are present, but without obstruction (a “unitive mystical state,” according to Forman) (Blackstone, 2005). In examining the descriptions of nondual consciousness within both the spiritual and psychological literature, it seems that the distinctions among them generally fall into one of these descriptions. Whether or not they are in fact referring to the same experience is not altogether clear.

Blackstone (2005) points out that for those traditions that argue that nondual consciousness is a realization of emptiness, their argument tends to be conceptual versus experiential in nature. As such, Blackstone (2005) leans towards those descriptions of nondual consciousness as an experience of all-pervasive luminous consciousness. Although some main distinctions between Buddhism and Vedanta can be made, one could also argue that they are approaching nonduality from opposite angles inevitably arriving at the same point.

In general, early Buddhism tends to emphasize the realization of emptiness in which all bifurcations of self and other are seen through and all is seen as one and completely interdependent. Advaita Vedanta also suggests that what is necessary for seeing the interdependent nature of reality, which is emptiness, is for the "veil of ignorance" (*ajnana*) to be lifted and for reality to be revealed (Loy, 1998, p. 64). The difference between the two, however, is that Buddhism then claims that consciousness is no more than the consciousness of what is being experienced, whereas Vedanta insists that everything which is experienced is in fact a manifestation of consciousness. For Buddhism, there is no self, only the world (no-consciousness), for Vedanta, the world is the self (all-consciousness) (Loy, 1998, p.210).

Despite this distinction, some might argue that Buddhism and Vedanta ultimately arrive at the same point.

> To say that there is no self, or that everything is the self, are then equally correct—or false, depending on how one looks at it. Both descriptions amount to the same thing. What is clear in each case is that there is no longer a duality between an object that is observed and a consciousness that observes it, or between the external world and the self which confronts it. (Loy, 1998, p. 210)

Although we may say that the nondual experience ultimately is the same regardless of the emphasis on emptiness or fullness, it is not entirely clear if that is the case. Descriptions which emphasize one aspect or the other may in fact point to other factors as well, of which we are not even aware. It could be noted that Western mystical experience is also often described in these two ways, as either an inward or outward experience, in which there is either a withdrawal from the world, or the merging into One (Loy, 1998, p. 211).

Interestingly, it is my experience that contemporary teachers working with their students often instruct on the issue of embodying nondual consciousness in everyday life. Although students often describe initial experiences of awakening in which emptiness is realized, further experiences seem to reflect the ways in which this state of being is embodied; in which emptiness comes to permeate form. This seems in line with models of spiritual development that have been posited which suggest that there may be an evolution of nondual consciousness in which early awakening is an experience of emptiness which, in deepening, comes to include fullness. Regardless of where emphasis is placed, most teachers would probably agree that emptiness and fullness cannot be separated, but are rather two sides of the same coin. As described in the *prajnaparamita*, or Heart Sutra, one of Buddhism's most important teachings, form is no other than emptiness and emptiness is no other than form (Pine, 2004).

Can nondual consciousness be experienced and is it immediate or gradual?

The question of whether or not nondual consciousness can be experienced or whether "no one is there" to experience it is arguably an issue of semantics more than anything else. On the level of the reified subject object split, in which an individual "I" is required to experience anything, then the answer seems to be that there is in fact no one to experience nondual realization for part of that realization is in the dissolution of the "I." However, I agree with Blackstone (2005) and others, in the assertion that, although the limited and constructed ego-

identity is transcended in nondual consciousness that, “people always do know when they have reached nonduality; it is an unmistakable and extremely enjoyable shift from the fragmented self/other experience of the world to an experience of oneness” (p. 15).

Another argument regarding nondual consciousness is whether it is an awareness that comes on gradually or all at once. Within the different Asian philosophies there are methods for attaining nondual realization in either a gradual or immediate way. These are sometimes referred to as bottom-up (i.e., gradual) or top-down (i.e., sudden) approaches to realization. Bottom-up approaches tend to emphasize a gradual process of development that requires skill-learning and a process by which identity is deconstructed, whereas top-down approaches posit that realization does not require a process of learning for there is no “path,” just the realization of what has always been there, one’s true nature (Butlein, 2005). Peter Fenner (2002) argues that methods intended to bring immediate realization, or the “discourse of immediacy” as he calls it, almost always collapse into the “discourse of change,” or gradual realization, because of the inherent paradox in accessing a state of awareness that by its definition cannot really be accessed through an effort towards a particularly defined goal. In other words, according to Fenner (2002), as soon as one engages in methods intended to bring immediate realization, they are in fact engaged in a process of gradual change because of the inherent duality set up by having a desired goal or outcome. Fenner (2003) does suggest, however, that, “the experience of the unconditioned mind is a very precise experience. It’s the only experience that is

totally open and without any structure" (p. 29). If we were to speak of any structure at all, Fenner (2003) says that we can speak of this state in terms of its purity, depth, and durability.

> By purity we mean the absence of objectifying structures. By the depth of the experience, we mean the extent to which the unconditioned pervades or infuses our conditioned existence. By duration, we mean how long we can rest in this state. (Fenner, 2003, p. 29)

This argument, however, does seem to contrast with those writers who suggest that, even if one is engaged in a process of realization, that true nondual consciousness is given by grace and at once. As John Welwood (2003) might suggest, it is not nondual consciousness itself that we come to gradually realize, but rather the tuning in to it that we learn to do. For Welwood (2003), a "pure, open field of awareness that is not divided into subject and object" (p. 142) is not conditioned and does not "arise and cease; it is always there, ready to reveal itself to the mind that knows how to tune into it" (p. 142). Adyashanti also makes a distinction between any process towards realization and realization itself. According to Adyashanti (Gray, 2003), nondual consciousness is a

> nonexperience—not being a product of mind, not even being prepared through mind. The mind just gets one to the threshold of it. It's not any more of an experience than waking up in the morning is an experience and realizing that whatever you dreamed the night before was only existing between your ears. Real awakening is very similar in that sense. (p. 86)

For Adyashanti, the idea that nondual realization is either a gradual or immediate process is not accurate for in actual experience, it can happen both ways.

Experiential qualities of nondual consciousness

A field of pure consciousness.

In her writings, Blackstone's (2005, 2007) own depiction of nondual consciousness leans towards the description of an experience of luminous and unified consciousness pervading one's entire being. Somewhat in contrast to Asian nondual teachings, Blackstone (2005) puts emphasis on the emotional and physical aspects of nondual consciousness saying that, "The experience of nondual consciousness pervading one's body is an experience of contact with oneself throughout the whole internal space of the body, as well as with the movement of one's thoughts, emotions and sensations" (p. 30). Blackstone (2005, 2006) argues that many of the Buddhist and Hindu descriptions of nondual consciousness and realization suggest that these states of awareness merely require cognitive shifts, and thus fail to acknowledge the emotional and somatic sensations which accompany them. I agree with Blackstone, and the question of whether contemporary descriptions of nondual consciousness emphasize more embodied qualities is an important one. In Blackstone's (2005, 2007) conceptualization, nondual consciousness is a non-active state, although we can choose to shift our awareness to focus on phenomena or the luminous consciousness pervading phenomena. Although there is a receptive quality to some descriptions of nondual consciousness, I would hesitate in stating that all experiences of nondual consciousness are void of active or directed awareness.

Drawing from Hindu and Buddhist traditions, contemporary nondual wisdom also suggests that there is a Ground of Being, much like James' prime

reality, that underlies who we are and that precedes our experience before we think our individual "I"s into being. Maharshi (Iyer, 2004) called this ground "Silence." According to Asian nondual philosophy, there is a distinction between perception and meaning, and this ground is seen as the realm of pure perception (Loy, 1998). "By its association with language all perception becomes 'determinate,' but this is necessarily preceded by an earlier stage when it is unassociated, a 'bare sensation'" (Loy, 1998, p. 43). Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is worth noting that the claim of experience which is unmediated and unconstructed, as suggested by Asian nondual philosophy, is challenged by Western constructivist philosophy which argues that all experience is constructed.

As previously noted, William James (1890) also believed that there is a field of pure consciousness that exists in spite of, and preceding our construction of "I." A scientist by nature, James was unable to identify the mechanism from which this state of pure consciousness arose, but in looking for such a source, he did reflect on the importance of the spaces that seemed to mark the movement from one thought to the next with no "I" mediating the process (Bricklin, 2003). In describing his own experience of this James (1890) says,

> During the syncope there is absolute psychic annihilation, the absence of all consciousness; then at the beginning of coming to, one has at a certain moment a vague, limitless, infinite feeling—a sense of *existence in general* [sic] without the least trace of distinction between the me and the not-me. (p. 263)

Renowned spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1954) also reflects on these gaps and says,

> If you watch very carefully you will see that, though the response, the movement of thought, seems so swift, there are gaps, there are intervals between thoughts. Between two thoughts there is a period of silence which is not related to the thought process. (p. 226)

These descriptions suggest that a field of pure consciousness or perception exists and precedes the subject-object bifurcation constructed by the mind. This is in fact what Merleau-Ponty referred to as the "primacy of perception" (Dillon, 1998).

Asian nondual philosophy further suggests that not only is there a realm of pure consciousness that precedes our construction of self, but that this realm is innate and in all beings (Katz, 2007). Hindu scripture goes on to suggest that not only is this uncreated dimension of luminous consciousness innate, but that there is an inherent desire towards this dimension, a desire which is described as wisdom. As the Hindu scripture, the *Avadhuta Gita*, suggests, "Through the grace of God alone, the desire for nonduality arises in wise people to save them from great fear" (as cited in Katz, 2007, p. 4). Great fear in this context refers to both the fear that we do not exist and that we are not in contact with what is true, what is real. In essence, our desire for nonduality is what will free us from the fear of nonduality.

Dissolution of dualistic fixations.

Just as James pointed to a prime reality in which the sense of self dissolves while consciousness remains, so too the Asian spiritual traditions point to a larger dimension of consciousness that is free of dualistic fixation.

> The Eastern spiritual traditions regard this egoless awareness as our true, essential nature, the very ground of our being. Tapping into this nondual presence… reveals a wide open field of awareness in which the separation between self and other, or perceiver and perceived, falls away. (Welwood, 2003, p. 139)

It is in this field of awareness that distinctions between self and other, phenomena and experience, melt away.

Traleg Rinpoche (1993) writes, "the phenomenal world and emptiness are totally united," and the absence of duality leads to a more direct relationship with the reality of the phenomenal world (p. 40). For Maharshi (Iyer, 2004), the experience of mind, from which the "I" or "ego" is created, is like the moon in the daytime sky; when dualistic fixations drop away the moon's light is reflected, but barely noticed in the midst of the sun's direct light; it does not disappear, but it does not stand in opposition to the sun. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj [born as Maruti Shivrampant Kambli] (1996), one of the most renowned twentieth century Indian teachers since Maharshi, also pointed to the illusory nature of the "I" as a construction of mind, and stated that, "to see all constructions of self and other as dependent reveals oneself as no-thing, dissolving illusions of an owner of an autonomous body moving in space and time, a continuing residue of personal qualities" (Berkow, 2003, p. 186).

Spontaneous arising.

Robert Forman (1998) writes that, for most people, their first reported nondual experiences were before they were educated in any teachings that explicated these experiences. Although Forman (1998) differentiates between

several different types of consciousness in which dualistic fixations are dissolved, as described previously, this finding is in line with the Asian spiritual teachings which state that the experience of nondual consciousness is not achieved or sought out and does not require an understanding of it to experience it. According to the fourteenth century Tibetan Buddhist Longchen Rabjam (2001), "Naturally occurring timeless awareness—utterly lucid awakened mind—is something marvelous and superb, primordially and spontaneously present" (p. 83). Other authors and teachers suggest that this consciousness is given by grace when the conditions for receiving this grace are right. As Maharshi (Iyer, 2004) states,

> There is no reaching the Self. If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not here and now but is yet to be obtained. What is got afresh will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say the Self is not reached. You *are*[sic] the Self; you are already That (p. 61). All that is required to realize the Self is to *be still* [sic]. What can be easier than that? (p. 64)

For Maharshi (Iyer) "Self" is, "that where there is absolutely no 'I' thought" (2004, p. 8), where subject and object are one.

A subtle shift.

Blackstone (2005) states that nondual consciousness or realization is not merely a cognitive experience. Rather, "it is a shift towards an openness, clarity, subtlety and unity in the way we experience ourselves and the world" (p. xi). She goes on to say that nondual consciousness is also not a state of attention for it requires no effort whatsoever.

> It is the mind completely at rest…there is not even a sense that the mind is resting, for that is still an activity of sorts. Rather, one experiences a simple openness in which objects appear, and through which experiences

> such as thoughts, emotions and sensation move without obstruction. Nor does nondual consciousness seem to involve one's head, as it appears to in intentional, dualistic consciousness states. Rather it pervades and subsumes one's whole body at the same time as it pervades everything in one's environment. (Blackstone, 2005, p. 2)

Forman (1998) suggests that what is encountered in the experiences which we define as nondual is "the subject's sheerest awareness itself" (p. 13), and in fact, it may be the encountering of one's own consciousness that is the commonality of nondual consciousness as it has been described among the world's traditions.

Integrated Discussion

In reviewing the psychological and spiritual literature one of the first things that becomes apparent is the near lack of empirical research examining the felt experience of nondual consciousness. From the perspective of traditional psychology, the term "nondual" is virtually not used, and when experiences that go beyond the confines of the psychologically defined ego are referred to, they are often considered pathological in nature. In the transpersonal literature, there have been several studies, primarily dissertations, which have explored various aspects of nondual realization and spiritual awakening. Although each offers important insights into the present study, virtually none have specifically looked at the actual felt experience of nondual consciousness, and so whether each study is in fact referring to the same phenomenon remains unclear. It is from the spiritual traditions that we find the most discussion of nondual consciousness. From these traditions there are quite elaborate descriptions of the practices by which one sees through conditioned mind and accesses nondual consciousness. However, this

writing is almost entirely based on the experiences of a few highly realized spiritual teachers and is so steeped in each particular spiritual tradition, and often so deeply delves into the realm of analytic debate about the nature of nonduality, that it can be difficult to identify the specific experience to which they actually refer.

Similarly, in reviewing the psychological and spiritual literature, we see that a variety of terms are utilized in reference to various distinctions of the experience of being. Transpersonal theorists use terms as varied as, "essence" and "living daylight" (Ali, 1986, 1988); "Ground" (Gray, 2003; Washburn, 1995; Welwood, 2000; Wilber, 1980, 2000); and "pure presence" (Welwood, 2009), among others. The spiritual traditions also include a wide host of terms referring to the subtle process of realization, including "transmutation," "self-liberation," and "spontaneous presence." In the psychological domain, terms such as "pure consciousness" and "prime reality" (James, 1890); "felt sense" and "felt shift" (Gendlin, 1981), among others are used. Although each of these terms refers to a specific dimension of experiencing, there appear to be overlaps among the experiences to which they actually refer. For example, Welwood's use of the term "pure presence" and James' "pure consciousness" both refer to a dimension of being from which all experience arises. This dimension is described as being free of the usual constructions of "I." Similarly, descriptions of "transmutation" where each moment of experience spontaneously unfolds into the next and aspects of conditioning completely fall away, are similar in many ways to descriptions of a "felt shift" in which, given an attitude of accepting whatever may come, a "felt

sense" spontaneously changes bringing with it a renewed sense of meaning and presence.

Similarly, it is quite interesting to look at the way in which Gendlin's work overlaps with certain themes in the nondual literature. With his emphasis on the felt sense, Gendlin's description is of a process by which one comes into contact with whatever is happening on a body level and a willingness to really be with that experience, as it shifts and transforms. To experience a felt sense one must remain keenly attuned to one's inner experience, that experience which is nonconceptual in nature. Although Gendlin's focus has not ever been on the spiritual dimensions of Focusing, some transpersonal practitioners who have used Focusing in their work have indicated that the experiences people describe when attending to their experience in this way, quite clearly resemble experiences in which bifurcations between subject and object dissolve (Welwood, personal communication, May, 2009). For example, the emphasis on the "freshness" of the felt sense points to a pure experience, seemingly unmediated by any conceptual idea of what the experience should be. Gendlin's description of how the felt sense comes, "like the way tearfulness or yawning *come* [sic] in us" (1996, p. 20) is also surprisingly similar to descriptions in the nondual literature of how nondual consciousness is given by grace. One might wonder if the experiences which both Gendlin and the nondual teachers describe are similar, and in what ways. With that said the nondual literature talks extensively about the process by which individuals attain nondual realization and the various levels of deconditioning that are experienced along the way. Gendlin's model does not purport to be a spiritual

path in this way, but simply to be a tool for deepening psychological development.

Another overlap in the literature discussed in this dissertation is in the description of Focusing as contrasted with inquiry. Although similar in many ways, there are several significant differences in the principles of inquiry versus Focusing that should be pointed out. In many ways, these differences illustrate the distinctions between a psychological and psychospiritual approach to subjective experience in general. As can be seen, both the practice of inquiry and the process of Focusing draw an individual into being with subjective experience in a very direct way. Whether by virtue of the fact that each practice emerges from a different philosophical framework, or from something else, inquiry and Focusing do so in different ways.

One of the first important distinctions between inquiry and Focusing is in the directive in Focusing to approach experience from a slightly removed stance. Gendlin (1981) himself, asserts that, in Focusing, the first movement of clearing a space involves "the act of pushing problems to one side temporarily, stacking them, stepping back and looking at them" (p. 13). This is different from stepping squarely into the maelstrom and letting it speak from the inside out, an approach more common to spiritual practices such as meditation and inquiry.

This slightly removed approach leads to a further area of distinction between inquiry and Gendlin's model. According to Welwood, the process of Focusing itself can subtly reinforce a dualistic split between self and other, a

division which could be argued, moves one further from direct experience. This division is further contributed to in the way that

> Focusing is commonly practiced, there is often a bias toward unfolding meaning from a felt sense, toward resolution, toward looking for a felt shift. In this way, it can become a form of "doing" that maintains a subtle I/it stance toward one's experience…Wanting our experience to change usually contains a subtle resistance to what is, to nowness, to what I call *unconditional presence* [sic]—the capacity to meet experience fully and directly, without filtering it through any conceptual or strategic agenda. (Welwood, 2000, p. 116)

Much like the psychological tradition from which it emerged, Focusing does contain a subtle implication that there is a desired outcome or goal. Although inquiry is also vulnerable to the influences of a desired outcome, its intention from the outset is to hold no goal in mind. Whereas Focusing identifies the felt shift as an important eventual step in the process of experiencing, inquiry overtly states that any attachment to a particular goal or experiential release will restrict the process itself.

In addition to the differences, there are also significant overlaps between Focusing and inquiry. The first is in the importance of attitude in each; both Focusing and inquiry maintain that an attitude of openness, nonjudgment, and willingness to enter the unknown are important to any process which directs us toward our subjective experience. Both practices also maintain that arriving at a directly felt experience generally requires several moments of silence and that sinking into one's experience may not happen without first experiencing an anxiety and temptation to remain outside of going deeply. Talking, staying at the conceptual level of mind, or any other forms of distraction are all common reactions to this commonly felt anxiety (Ali, 2002; Gendlin, 1996). As such,

another similarity is that, in many ways, both Focusing and inquiry are techniques for moving from the conceptual level of mind to the deeper level of mind-body experience (Welwood, 2000).

Another point of comparison in the literature is in the potential benefits of being with experience as described in both the psychological and spiritual literature. As Gendlin found in his early research, not only is every aspect of who we are informed by a subtle bodily awareness which can be experienced, but that attending to this felt sense in just the right way brings about a shift in both the felt sense and the overall experience itself. Whether a parallel can be drawn between the subtle inner experience of the felt sense and the experience of resting in a state of undivided consciousness, benefits to both have been shown.

Unresolved Issues

Drawing from the psychological and psychospiritual literature regarding nondual consciousness and felt experiencing, several unresolved issues emerge. The first is that, aside from a number of dissertations exploring topics related to nondual consciousness, I was unable to locate any empirical studies looking at the actual lived experience of nondual consciousness. In the midst of prolific teaching and theorizing about nondual consciousness, a closer look at the qualitative experience of such consciousness has not systematically occurred.

Related to this issue is the fact that the experience of subject/object dissolution has been identified and described via various terms in multiple traditions. With each of these terms, within each tradition, myriad explanations,

theories, and arguments about the nature of the phenomenon, its origins, its development, and its meaning exist. It is unclear, from the level of these discussions if the phenomenon to which they point to is in fact the same or not. Similarly, there are practices and models of development within the psychological domain that point to states of being that also seem to share characteristics of nondual consciousness. These traditions make no mention of nonduality, yet the experience to which they sometimes refer appears similar in nature. Whether an agreed upon definition for nondual consciousness is possible or even worthwhile, is debatable, but a clarification of what may be a similar phenomena may serve to disambiguate some of the various terms currently used.

A somewhat different issue stems from the way in which traditional psychology tends to emphasize the pathological nature of nonordinary phenomena. The experience of nondual consciousness does not fit neatly into the traditional psychological paradigm which emphasizes strengthening of the ego and development of identity. The Asian spiritual traditions, in contrast, see such phenomena as exemplary of the potential for human transformation. The fact that increasing numbers of individuals in the West are having experiences of nondual consciousness poses an issue for mainstream psychology which tends to see such experiences as negative and problematic in nature. To be able to more fully understand such experiences, utilizing the tools and language of traditional psychology might help in depathologizing what, in some traditions, is seen as a profound human capacity.

Similarly, the Eastern spiritual traditions, with their emphasis on experiencing for oneself with the assistance of a teacher, do not place value on empirical analyses of phenomena in general, as traditional psychology does. There is often a very practical tendency to encourage individuals away from conceptualizing in traditional forms such as writing and speaking about experiences which are nonconceptual in nature. This is found not only in the spiritual traditions, but in the psychospiritual field as well. This tendency has contributed to one school of thought which is that, due to the impossibility of ever being able to put nondual consciousness into words, we should not try to do so. As limited as words may be, this bias seems to throw the baby out with the bathwater so to speak. The reality is that for over five decades nondual teachings have gained a foothold in the West. Just as these teachings have been embraced by so many individuals, the necessity for a richer context within which to understand them is needed.

Research Questions

1. What is the felt experience of nondual consciousness as described by individuals familiar and adept at experiencing in this way?

2. In what ways, if any, is the felt experience of nondual consciousness parallel to the experiential process described by models such as those in the therapeutic domain (i.e., Gendlin and Welwood)?

3. Is the actual felt experience of nondual consciousness true to the theoretical description thus far primarily written about and taught within the spiritual traditions, but not systematically examined through scholarly research?

Chapter 3

Methods

The following chapter outlines the basic methodology of the present study. Operational definitions regarding the research questions are offered followed by a review of the participant information, selection criteria, and parameters of the interviews. A discussion of the research approach and overall research procedure of the study itself are then presented. Following this will be a discussion of the chosen methodology design and a description of the actual data analysis procedure.

Operational Definitions

This study attempted to (a) capture and describe the inwardly felt experience of nondual consciousness, and reflections about nondual consciousness, and (b) explore and examine the conditions, situations, and context for nondual consciousness. Each of the research questions intended to address the overall intentions of the study were operationally defined as follows:

1. *What is the felt experience of nondual consciousness as described by individuals familiar and adept at experiencing this way?* "Felt Experience" in this study refers to the inner concrete flow of "something present, directly referred to, and felt" (Gendlin, 1962, p. 243). It is that "inner sense," which can be located when attention is directed inwardly, which is at once so simple and universally experienced that it is not easily pointed to (Gendlin, 1962, p. 12). "Nondual Consciousness" can be defined as experience in which one's sense of internal self ("I") is no longer experienced as separate from external phenomena (world). "Individuals familiar and adept at experiencing this way" refers to those participants who were selected using screening methods based on criteria established by transpersonal psychology, and evaluated by this researcher, dissertation chair, and

experts as needed, who possess knowledge and capacity for experiencing and articulating their felt sense of nondual consciousness.

2. *In what ways, if any, is the felt experience of nondual consciousness parallel to the experiential process described by models such as those in the therapeutic domain (i.e., Gendlin and Welwood).* "Experiential process described by models such as those in the therapeutic domain" refers specifically to Gendlin's Focusing model and Welwood's descriptions of the unfolding of experience, both previously described.

3. *Is the actual felt experience of nondual consciousness true to the theoretical description thus far primarily written about and taught within the spiritual traditions, but not systematically examined through scholarly research?* "Theoretical description thus far primarily written about and taught within the spiritual traditions" specifically refers to the various theoretical descriptions and debates within the spiritual wisdom traditions and contemporary spiritual teachings, summarized previously.

Participants and Selection Criteria

This study included 8 participants. Several considerations were taken into account in regards to criteria for participation. Firstly, participants were required to have an understanding and regular experience of nondual consciousness. It was expected that each participant might have their own definition and understanding of nondual consciousness, simply based on the variety of ways in which nonduality is defined in the literature; however, participants were required to have confidence in their own ability for nondual consciousness. In addition, participants were required to be willing and interested in engaging in a study requiring them to go into direct experience and also talk about it. Participants who were familiar with nondual consciousness, but opposed to using language to speak about it, were not selected. Participants who seemed unfamiliar with nondual consciousness or were unwilling to engage in the process itself were also not

selected. Finally, efforts were made to select participants who would be articulate in their description of their felt experience of nondual consciousness and in answers to interview questions. This was not meant to invalidate the experiences of those individuals whose strength is not articulation, but to increase the likelihood of gathering the richest and most useful data possible.

A snowball technique was employed to recruit participants in this study, and potential participants were first emailed a letter of introduction/invitation (See Appendix A) introducing them to the researcher, the nature of the study, and inviting them to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. For the most part, participants were identified as being appropriate for this study by virtue of being initially identified as such by this researcher and/or researcher's dissertation chair. A few participants inquired about the nature of the study and asked for additional details prior to agreeing to participate. Ultimately, every individual contacted agreed to participate in the study.

Interview Type and Format

The general structure of the interview was a digitally recorded semi-structured interview lasting approximately 1 to 2 hours. Prior to meeting, participants were sent the participant bill of rights (Appendix B), interview consent and confidentiality form (Appendix C), and participant demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) and asked to complete these documents prior to their scheduled interview. Interviews took place in the location of participants' choice which included their private offices and homes, and in the case of one interview,

over the phone. Interviews began with a brief introduction by the researcher regarding what the participant would be asked to do and an informal discussion to answer any questions not answered prior to the interview.

The general structure of the interview included two parts: a) Interview questions in which participants were asked about their experiences of nondual consciousness in general, and b) participant's articulation of their felt experience of nondual consciousness as they were actually experiencing it in real time. The order in which these two aspects of the interview were conducted varied and not all questions were used in each interview. Question selection was based on the content disclosed and how and when participants identified that they were experiencing nondual consciousness in the moment.

Initially, participants who felt that their ability to articulate the phenomenon of nondual consciousness would be more fully accessible to them by experiencing on their own without the presence of the researcher, were given the opportunity to tape record the experiential aspect of the interview on their own time. This option was presented to all participants prior to their interviews. None of the participants requested this option and so no follow-up material was gathered. Participants were offered the option on the consent form to receive a copy of their completed transcript for review and clarification. Three participants chose this option, 2 of whom responded with minor changes that did not significantly alter the content of the interviews or analysis of data. One of these participants (participant #2, "Judith") also requested that her actual first name versus a pseudonym be used.

Although no monetary compensation was offered for participation in this study, it was hoped that the experience of engaging in research which aims to illuminate a phenomenon of such importance and subtlety, both for the individual and the contribution to research, would be a powerful and enriching personal experience.

Interview Questions

Primary questions which were asked in every interview are represented by those that are numbered. Additional questions identified by letters were used as follow up and for fuller clarification. Questions identified by letters were not necessarily asked in each interview. Questions about participants' direct experience of nondual consciousness were asked whenever it was felt that participants were most deeply in their experience, as determined by specific process indicators, to be further discussed in the results chapter.

1. There seem to be a variety of different terms used to describe the experience of consciousness or awareness which is nonegoic. What term do you prefer?

   a. How would you define (term they use)?

   b. (If they do not use the term "nondual consciousness"). Sometimes the term "nondual consciousness" is used in this context. How would you define nondual consciousness?

2. Tell me about your experience of nondual or awakened consciousness (or term they use).

   a. Tell me about your awakening (or term they use).

   b. In your experience, has your experience of nondual consciousness been a process with particular stages or shifts?

c. Where are you in this process now?

d. Was there a particular practice or spiritual tradition that informed this experience? Is there currently one?

e. Were there times, or are there now, when you practiced as a way to try to “achieve” this experience?

f. How is your actual experience affected by or different than how you thought it might be?

3. How do you experience nondual consciousness now?

a. How has this affected/impacted your life? Work? Relationships? Challenges? Benefits? Neutral?

b. How has this affected/impacted your experience of fear? Suffering? Love? Empathy?

c. Do you experience shifts between dualistic and nondualistic consciousness?

d. If yes, can you say something about the conditions in which these shifts happen. What affects a shift? What inhibits or promotes? Are there blocks, fears, attachments?

e. If no, can you reflect on times that you did? Is there anything which you currently experience which you would call dualistic or egoic consciousness?

f. Is there still a way in which dualistic experience or thinking fits in to your experience?

g. Some people would say that self-reflection is a dualistic function. Does self-reflection serve a function in your role as a teacher/therapist/etc.?

h. Do you think that your experience as a man/woman has impacted your experience of nondual consciousness?

4. This may be a subtle distinction, but how do you experience nondual consciousness right now, in this very moment, in this interview?

a. Letting yourself just connect to your inner experience, can you say something about what you notice?

b. Are you able to tell when you are experiencing in this way?

c. Is there an impact on your felt experience of nondual consciousness in the presence of another person, like right now?

d. Does it matter if the other person is "awake?"

5. Is there anything that I have not yet asked that feels important to talk about or that I have missed?

Research Approach

Inherent in any theoretical model are certain biases based on a set of assumptions. This study draws upon the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology and makes use of Boyatzis' (1998) qualitative thematic analysis method for developing a data-driven code.

The unique nature of nondual consciousness and lack of qualitative research exploring this phenomenon makes the basic assumptions of phenomenology an especially appropriate fit for this dissertation. Phenomenological research rests upon the basic belief that the exploration of individual experience is of value and that the "universal essence" of any given concept or phenomenon will emerge through the gathering and analysis of multiple individual descriptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Imbedded in this belief is the assumption that there are shared aspects of any given experience despite the uniquely felt quality of any phenomenon. Additionally, phenomenological theory (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) posits that human understanding, at its core, is a matter of understanding the world through one's

ongoing stream of felt experiences which are grounded in the body and that this is what is meant by "being in the world" (Stelter, 2000).

Although there are several different approaches to phenomenology, there are common philosophical assumptions to each, which include the stress on lived conscious experiences (van Manen, 1990); and the emphasis on descriptions of the essence, versus analyses of these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). From a philosophical perspective, phenomenology is grounded in the writings of several important philosophers and theoreticians, including German mathematician Edmund Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Marleau-Ponty (Spiegelberg, 1982).

The general structure of any phenomenological inquiry is to identify a concept or phenomenon of human experience, to collect data from multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, and develop a composite description highlighting the "what" and "how" of the phenomenon, which describes the essence of the phenomenon for all the individuals (Cresswell, 2007, p. 58). As with other qualitative approaches, phenomenology involves a dialogical process between researcher and data in which interpretations of descriptive phenomena are made and meanings of the lived phenomena are mediated on a recurring basis (Cresswell, 2007). As an aspect of this process, researchers are encouraged to "bracket" or explicitly state their own connection and inherent biases to the phenomenon at hand so that information under examination can be approached with freshness (Moustakas, 1994).

This study further draws upon the argument made by Braud and Anderson (1998) for an expanded vision of research which is especially suited to topics that

examine human experiences that are "personal, subjective, significant, and relevant" (p. 19). These types of experiences are usually "inwardly experiential," and may or may not be easily seen from an outside perspective (p. 19). These types of experiences, however, tend to be rich and inspiring, and often hold transformative value and potential, offering a means to deal with crisis, or offering a deepened sense of one's self and the world. These effects are not limited to the experiencer alone, but may also have an impact on others. It has been suggested that in order to conduct research of transpersonal experiences, we must be willing to loosen some of our ideas of experimental control and must be willing to expand our ideas about what constitutes legitimate research in general (Anderson, 1998). An expansion of this kind does not imply any less rigor or scientific acumen on the part of the researcher.

Data analysis methods.

Data from this study was analyzed by using a combination of Boyatzis' (1998) qualitative thematic analysis method for developing a data-driven code and a consensual coding approach developed by Dr. Katherine McGovern, faculty and program director of the clinical psychology program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information in which explicit codes representing themes or patterns found in the data are developed. These themes or patterns should at a minimum describe and organize the possible observations and at a maximum interpret aspects of the phenomenon. As Boyatzis (1998) describes, codes,

> may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something between these two forms…A theme may be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (underlying the phenomenon). (p. 4)

Boyatzis' (1998) method outlines three stages: (a) addressing design and sampling issues; (b) developing themes and a corresponding code; and (c) establishing the validity, reliability, and use of the code. This design is particularly appropriate to this type of study given the paucity of current research regarding psychospiritual phenomenon, and the developing evidence of the importance of such research (see Braud & Anderson, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Petitmengin, 1999, 2006).

In addition to Boyatzis (1998) method for qualitative thematic analysis, a consensual coding technique developed by Dr. Katherine McGovern of the California Institute of Integral Studies was employed in the coding of the data in this study. This technique is particularly useful in ensuring validity and reliability of qualitative data and is complementary to Boyatzis' (1998) description of theme and code development. One of the distinguishing features of the consensual coding technique is its implementation of multiple coders who review the data as a team and come to agreements regarding codes by consensus.

Consensual coding, as outlined by McGovern (presentation, November 2010), includes seven steps which are akin to grounded theory methodology especially in the emphasis on developing codes that emerge directly from what is "heard" within the interviews versus coders interpretations based on preconceptions. A template developed by McGovern outlining these steps is presented in Appendix E. Although the methodology in this study was not grounded theory per se, the use of consensual coding as a technique for coding

data was deemed especially useful given this study's emphasis on understanding nondual consciousness as it was experienced by participants.

Data analysis procedure.

For the purposes of consensual coding, two doctoral candidates in clinical psychology, already familiar with the consensual coding technique, were recruited to form the coding team alongside this researcher. Meetings took place primarily through video conferencing and were usually 2-3 hours in length. Roughly eight meetings took place over a 2 month period, with follow up discussions occurring periodically once the code was developed. Following the steps laid out by McGovern, the following is a description of the consensual coding process as it occurred.

The first step of consensual coding involved the coders familiarizing themselves with the research questions by discussing them as a group. As suggested, this process is done in an effort for coders to develop an understanding of what is the "real question." In this step the coding team discussed the study as a whole and came to a sense that the question was "what is the felt experience of nondual consciousness?" Special attention was given to describe the specific nature of the interview process and the distinction within interviews between participants discussing their thoughts about their experience of nondual consciousness as well as describing nondual consciousness in the moment as it was occurring.

Second, coders engaged in a process of "bracketing," as described earlier in this chapter. In this step the coding team presented and discussed their various thoughts and personal viewpoints regarding the topic of study. This was done in an effort to become conscious of the possible biases and perspectives that each coder might be bringing to the coding process. Of note, everyone in the coding team expressed a deep curiosity regarding the topic of nondual consciousness. Alongside this curiosity, one coder expressed some skepticism about the nature of nondual consciousness. The second coder described his own biases regarding his own knowledge and practice of Buddhism, acknowledging that he might be coming in with a previously defined framework for nondual consciousness. Both members of the coding team, in contrast to this researcher, were men, and this was acknowledged as something to remain aware of during the coding process. As the primary researcher I acknowledged that my own experience of the topic was impacted by experiences of nondual consciousness throughout my life and most notably in the last number of years. The coding team determined to periodically review throughout the coding process how interpretation of data might be affected by these biases and to address any issues if they arose.

In the third step coders independently read through the transcripts, familiarizing themselves with the material they would be reviewing together. Coders were encouraged to read these interviews, not with the intention of finding any codes, but primarily to gain a sense of the nature of the topic, the feeling of the interviews, and the individual participants. Coders were encouraged to make note of any particular reactions or areas that stood out to them. Fictional names

and numbers were assigned to each individual participant prior to this step, thus retaining the anonymity of each participant, even to the coding team.

In the fourth step coders began the first phase of coding the data as a team. This step involved the unstructured method of "open coding" in which transcripts were examined without any predetermined code, and codes were derived entirely from the data itself. The process of open coding generally leads to the development of a codebook made up of discrete codes. As stated by Saldana (2009) a code is generally "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). As Saldana (2009) goes on to emphasize, coding is an interpretive art versus a precise science.

In regards to this study, this step involved two parts: identifying content that should be coded through a thorough review of each transcript, personal reflection and discussion, and second, determining a name for the code. Consensus was required amongst the coding team that the material was important and the name was a reasonably accurate summary of the content. Determination of the "codable moment" was generally made by coders reflecting on the specific interview question being asked at any given time, the "real question" discussed earlier, and discussion as a team in regards to the specific content. Something that became evident early on in the coding process was that codes related to the content of participants' transcripts as well as codes representing the process within the interviews themselves were both found.

In the fifth step of the coding process, called “category coding,” which is not necessarily separate from open coding, coders use notes or memos to begin to identify relationships between codes, eventually leading to the development of categories and, if appropriate, more complex structures. This step is sometimes done by the researcher or can be done with the assistance of the coding team. In the case of this study, the coding team identified initial categories and emergent patterns, concurrently with the identification of codes. Much discussion took place regarding how initial codes might be grouped into larger code families and general categories that families of codes might represent. Within these discussions, the coding team identified and discussed how emergent patterns might be connected and related to the research question. In between coding sessions some category coding occurred on my part as the primary researcher and was then presented to the coding team during later coding sessions. In this way, open coding and category coding occurred simultaneously.

Based on group discussion, two central categories emerged early on, one related to participant’s thoughts, beliefs, and feelings in regards to the presence of nondual consciousness in their lives, and the second related to the directly felt experience of nondual consciousness. Coders began to identify process indicators early on in the coding that seemed to hallmark when codes fell into one or the other primary categories.

Consensual coding by the coding team continued until it appeared that the development of codes and identification of patterns and themes had been saturated. This occurred after completing the fourth interview transcript. At that

point, I continued coding for the remaining four transcripts, consulting with one or more members of the coding team for verification when questions arose.

The sixth step of consensual coding involves utilizing the analysis of the data to answer the research questions. In the case of the present study this involved the development of a thorough description of the phenomenon built on the narrative descriptions and frequency of themes derived from the data. Although this step occurred in an informal way during the consensual coding process, further refinement of codes continued through the last step of the coding process. In this way, codes were further and further examined, categorized, and sometimes recategorized. Recategorization of codes into broader categories, subcategories, and themes was then discussed with the coding team to ensure that further refinement and analyses of codes was felt to be true to the initial interviews and the open coding process.

The last step of the consensual coding technique is data reduction and data display. This step is usually completed by the researcher alone and involves the development of a concise way of presenting the voluminous data common of qualitative studies. In this step, codes and categories were reviewed multiple times, with various models of organizing the data considered. Memos noted earlier in the coding process were further examined and used to help in the final refinement process. Within this step, the final coding template, presented in the next chapter, was finally derived as a concise way of displaying the data while remaining true to the content itself. This template was shown to the coding team to ensure that it made sense and was felt to be an authentic display of the data.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the interview process, a description of the participants, description of the demographic questionnaire, and participants' demographic data. Following is a presentation of the final coding template, and presentation of the results. Participants have been assigned fictional names and identifying information has been removed to ensure confidentiality. Aside from known public figures, fictional names have also been used for any individual mentioned by a participant in a context that would compromise the privacy of the participant or the individual mentioned.

Summary of Interview Process

Eight participants were interviewed regarding their experience of nondual consciousness (NDC). Interview questions were divided into two parts. First, participants were asked to reflect on and speak about their experience of NDC. These questions focused on participants' experience of NDC in their life in general and the impact of NDC on their life currently. Second, participants were asked to describe their direct experience of NDC as it was occurring in the interview itself. Depending on the nature of each interview, in some cases, questions from both the first and second parts were interspersed. All 8 participants were able to engage in both parts of the interview process, and were willing to articulate their experience of NDC conceptually and experientially as they were experiencing it in the moment.

Description of Research Participants

This study included 8 participants, all of whom were familiar with and were able to regularly have experiences of nondual consciousness (NDC). As expected, participants varied in their own use of the term “nondual consciousness,” and understandings of NDC varied. Variability in the use of terms is reflected in and will be discussed more thoroughly in regards to the theme labeled “Terminology related to nondual consciousness” in the final coding template. All participants, however, expressed confidence in their own ability for NDC and a willingness to articulate their thoughts and direct experience with this researcher.

Participants' Demographic Data

This study included 8 participants including 4 men and 4 women. Participant ages ranged from 33 to 66 years old, with a mean age of 54.5 years old. Five participants indicated their ethnicity to be “Caucasian,” 1 listed “Euro-American,” and 2 participants listed “Jewish.” All participants were of European descent and all were born and currently live in the United States.

The demographic questionnaire asked participants to indicate their first language and languages that they speak. The intention in soliciting this information was in regards to the issue of words and nondual experience, and to determine if any relationship might be found between participants’ own willingness and ability to articulate their felt experience and the languages they speak. Because no explicit questions were asked regarding participants’ experience of language in their own life, it is difficult to draw any conclusions

about how a participant's language knowledge may or may not be connected to his or her experience of NDC. Specific responses to these questions are included in each individual participant summary.

Questions regarding marital status and children were asked primarily to gain a more detailed picture of each participant's personal life and are included in the introduction of each individual participant summary. Participants were next asked to identify their occupation. It is noteworthy that, in addition to other occupations listed, 7 of the participants listed psychologist or psychotherapist. This may be due simply to the pool of participants most readily available to this researcher. However it would be interesting to investigate further if there is something unique about either the field of psychology that opens people to NDC or alternately, that individuals already drawn to NDC find psychology a traditional field that supports this understanding. Other occupations listed are included in each individual participant summary.

Participants were asked how many years of formal education they have, again with the intention of gaining additional biographical information, and to see if any correlation might be found between experiences of NDC and formal education. Number of years of formal education ranged from 7 - 22 years or "through Ph.D." No follow up questions were asked to standardize the data, or to determine how participants defined "formal education" and so correlations cannot fairly be made.

The next demographic questions asked participants to identify their current and former religious/spiritual tradition(s) if any. These questions were

intended to offer further biographical information regarding each participant and to potentially inform the particular context or worldview that each participant may hold or have been brought up with which may or may not influence their understanding and experience of NDC. Of note, only 1 participant, "Steven, participant #2," listed "nondual" as a religious/spiritual tradition, suggesting that for others, nondual is not a thing or a perspective, and is not a preferred term they use. Alternately, some spiritual traditions listed, such as Advaita Vedanta, for example, may include concepts regarding nonduality. Individual spiritual/religious traditions are included in each individual participant summary.

The final question on the demographic questionnaire asked participants to identify any current spiritual "practices." This question was intended to capture whether or not participants engaged in any practices which may or may not be related to their experience of NDC and to see whether any commonalities exist. Information from this question as well as interview questions regarding practices will be further discussed in the section describing practices related to the experience of NDC.

Participant Demographics

Participant #1 "Paul."

"Paul" is a 55-year-old Caucasian man born in the United States. His first and only language is English. Paul indicated having a partner and two children, and is a psychologist in private practice with 22 years of formal education. Paul indicated his current religious/spiritual tradition to be Buddhism, and left the

question regarding former religious/spiritual tradition blank. Paul's current spiritual practice is Dzogchen.

Participant #2 "Steven."

"Steven" is a 61-year-old Caucasian man born in the United States. His first and only language is English. Steven is married with two children, and is a psychologist and meditation teacher. He indicated "Ph.D." as his total number of years of formal education. Steven listed "Nondual" as his current religious/spiritual tradition and Protestant/Episcopalian as his former spiritual/religious tradition. Steven's spiritual practices include "meditation, Yoga Nidra, hatha, pranayama, and sutra."

Participant #3 "Judith."

"Judith" is a 62-year-old Jewish Caucasian woman born in the United States. Judith's first language is English and she speaks some French. She is married with no children and is a psychotherapist and realization process teacher. Judith indicated "through Ph.D." for her total number of years of formal education. Judith indicated "no tradition" for her current religious/spiritual tradition, and "no affiliation, training in Zen and Tibetan Buddhism and Hindu Bhakti," as her former religious/spiritual tradition. She listed "Embodied Meditation" as her current spiritual practice.

Participant #4 "Robert."

"Robert" is a 59-year-old Caucasian man born in the United States. His first language is English and he also listed "French (conversational, not fluent)" as another language spoken. Robert is married with one child, and is a psychotherapist, professor, and writer with 21 years of formal education. Robert listed "Advaita Vedanta/Kashmiri Shaivism" as his current religious/spiritual tradition and Episcopalian as his former spiritual/religious tradition. As his current spiritual practice, Robert listed "irregular sitting (resting in Awareness.)"

Participant #5 "Sophia."

"Sophia" is a 58-year-old Jewish Caucasian woman born in the United States. Sophia's first language is Yiddish and she speaks both English and Hebrew. She is married with three children and is a psychotherapist in private practice. Sophia indicated having 22 years of formal education. In answer to demographic questions regarding current and former religious/spiritual traditions, Sophia indicated "Jewish" for both. She listed "Authentic Movement" as her current spiritual practice.

Participant #6 "Ben."

"Ben" is a 33-year-old Caucasian man born in the United States. Ben's first language is English and he is fluent in both English and Mandarin Chinese. Ben is single with no children, and is a therapist. Ben indicated having 18 years of formal education. Ben indicated his current religious/spiritual tradition as

“Vedanta?” and “grew up Catholic until age 12,” as his former religious/spiritual tradition. His current spiritual practices are daily meditation and a bi-monthly meditation group.

Participant #7 “Ellen.”

“Ellen” is a 66-year-old Caucasian woman born in the United States. Her first language is English, and she also listed “Spanish (minimal)” under other languages spoken. Ellen is married with two children, and is a spiritual teacher and psychotherapist in private practice, with 18 years of formal education. Ellen listed “Eclectic” as her current religious/spiritual tradition and “Christian; Buddhist; Advaita” as her former spiritual/religious tradition. Ellen’s current spiritual practice is “being here for what’s here.”

Participant #8 “Laura.”

“Laura” is a 42-year-old Caucasian woman born in the United States. Her first language is English with “minor exposure to German, Spanish,” listed under other languages spoken. Laura is married with no children, and listed “minister” as her occupation. Laura indicated having 7 years of formal education. Laura listed “Zen Buddhist, Vedanta, Christian” as her current religious/spiritual traditions and “Catholic, Vedanta” as her former spiritual/religious traditions. Laura’s spiritual practices include “meditation, qi-qong, (periodic Hatha yoga), prayer, and life!”

Presentation of Final Coding Template

The final coding template represents all of the primary categories, subcategories, and themes derived from the data. The template itself is presented here as a guiding structure and reference. There are two primary categories in the final coding template: "Presence of nondual consciousness in one's life," and "Directly felt experience of nondual consciousness itself." Multiple subcategories made up of discrete themes were found within each primary category. Following the presentation of the final coding template, each category, subcategory, and theme will be presented in detail, along with accompanying narrative data. Whenever elipses [...] are used they are generally done so to condense narrative data, not to connect disparate parts of an interview. When composite quotes are presented they are indicated as such.

Families of subcategories, which clustered into the two primary categories, represent general concepts found across all participants that are distinctly separate from one another, and, in general, emerged directly from the interview questions. Within each subcategory are multiple themes, and in some cases subthemes which, like categories and subcategories, are conceptual in nature and were developed in the coding process as ways of distinguishing between discrete families of themes.

Congruent with Saldana's (2009) description, codes represent the smallest units of data, and generally capture the primary content of the data in the words of each participant. In the final coding template, families of codes which were determined to hold similarities found among 5 or more participants are

represented by themes. Themes which were found in less than 5 participants are those that were determined to hold particular valence to the topic at hand, as agreed upon by the coding team. Minor themes and variant themes which were found in fewer than 5 participants, and which may be idiosyncratic in nature, will be presented within the discussion of each individual participant and will be indicated as such. In general, minor themes are those that were found in three or 4 participants, and themes found in fewer than 3 participants were considered variant themes. Minor themes and variant themes are not included in the final coding template. However, tables including these themes will be included in some sections in an effort to help readers contextualize these themes, and when appropriate, they are mentioned in the context of specific narrative content. Specific codes are not included in the final coding template, except for in cases where doing so will enhance the understanding of a particular theme.

Final coding template.

Primary Category 1: Presence of Nondual Consciousness in one's Life

Subcategory 1: Terminology related to nondual consciousness

Theme 1: Multiplicity of terms
Theme 2: Fluidity of terms
Theme 3: Relationship between words and experience

Subcategory 2: Personal ideas regarding the nature of nondual consciousness

Subcategory 3: Nondual consciousness as a process over time

Theme 1: Early experiences of nondual consciousness
Theme 2: Stage of seeking nondual consciousness
Theme 3: Experience of nondual consciousness although sense of separate self remains
Theme 4: Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding nondual consciousness

Theme 5: Stabilization of nondual consciousness

Subcategory 4: Supports for nondual consciousness

Theme 1: External Guidance

Subtheme 1: Role of teacher(s)

Subtheme 2: Role of teaching(s)

Theme 2: Practices

Subcategory 5: Impact of nondual consciousness on life

Theme 1: More letting go and allowing

Theme 2: More ease

Theme 3: More trust

Theme 4: More clarity

Subcategory 6: Conditions related to the experience of nondual consciousness

Theme 1: Enhancing conditions

Theme 2: Inhibiting conditions

Primary Category 2: Directly Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness Itself

Subcategory 1: Essential qualities of the felt experience of nondual consciousness

Theme 1: Ineffable

Theme 2: Energy

Theme 3: Positively experienced

Theme 4: Nonlocalized

Theme 5: Dynamic

Theme 6: Verticality

Subcategory 2: Felt Sense of Nondual Consciousness

Theme 1: Felt sense of Mutuality

Theme 2: Felt sense of Truth

Theme 3: Felt sense of A Bigger underlying movement

Theme 4: Felt sense of Openness

Theme 5: Felt sense of Form and formlessness

Theme 6: Felt sense of No division

Theme 7: Felt sense of "Me-ness"

Presentation of Results

Primary category 1: Presence of nondual consciousness in one's life.

The first primary category is: "Presence of nondual consciousness in one's life." Primary category 1 refers to general ideas about, and ways in which nondual consciousness (NDC) has been experienced in a participant's life over time. This category does not include specific descriptions of the phenomenon of NDC, except as it is referred to within the context of one's life. Data within this category clustered into six subcategories: "Terminology related to nondual consciousness," "Personal ideas regarding the nature of nondual consciousness," "Nondual consciousness as a process over time," "Supports for nondual consciousness," "Impact of nondual consciousness on life," and "Conditions related to the experience of nondual consciousness." Each of these subcategories and their corresponding themes are presented here.

Subcategory 1 of primary category 1: Terminology related to nondual consciousness.

Coders identified the subcategory of "Terminology related to nondual consciousness" for all 8 participants. This subcategory refers specifically to the use of verbal and nonverbal terms and gestures, as well as the relationship between words and experience as related to nondual consciousness (NDC). Individual participant data related to the subcategory of "Terminology related to nondual consciousness" clustered into three main themes: "Multiplicity of terms,"

“Fluidity of terms,” and “Relationship between words and experience.” Each theme is described below.

Theme 1 of subcategory 1: Multiplicity of terms.

“Multiplicity of terms” refers to participants’ use of multiple terms in reference to nondual consciousness (NDC), defined in this study as, experiences of nonegoic consciousness in which one’s sense of internal self (“I”) is no longer experienced as separate from external phenomena (world). All 8 participants reported the use of multiple terms for these experiences and a total of 24 terms were identified across participant transcripts. The following table shows the different terms identified and used by participants to describe these experiences, the percentage of participants who use the term, along with the participant transcript number.

Table 1

Terms Used to Describe Experience of Nondual Consciousness

Term	*Percent of transcripts with term*	*Participant #*
Openness	75	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Mystery	50	2, 4, 6, 7
This	37.5	1, 7, 8
Nondual consciousness	25	3, 7
Presence	25	6, 7
Space	25	3, 4
Knowingness/Knowing	12.5	8

(continued)

Term	*Percent of transcripts with term*	*Participant #*
Nondual awareness	12.5	7
Undivided consciousness	12.5	4
True self	12.5	8
Essential nature	12.5	8
Non-separate awareness	12.5	4
Fundamental consciousness	12.5	3
Consciousness	12.5	4
Unconditional presence	12.5	1
Unconditioned mind	12.5	1
Natural wakefulness	12.5	1
Oceanic feeling	12.5	5
Change	12.5	5
Non-thought	12.5	1
Emptiness	12.5	1
Totality	12.5	7
True nondual	12.5	7
Wholeness of being	12.5	7

Author's image.

Regarding the term "nondual consciousness" itself, 1 participant (Judith, participant #3) reported that it is one of her preferred terms, among others. Four participants (Paul, p#1; Robert, p#4; Ben, p#6; and Ellen, p#7) reported preferences for other terms, however, were neutral regarding the term "nondual consciousness." Three participants spoke directly about the term "nondual consciousness" and why they do not prefer it or dislike it altogether. The following quotes illustrate this perspective.

> People try to understand intellectually what nondual is, or consciousness, and then people confuse consciousness with the content from the larger aspect. (Steven, p#2)
>
> This thing of nondual, I don't like that kind of negative "non" "dual" kind of thing. It actually is a very cumbersome term, "nondual consciousness"…sounds like a very academic, intellectual term that's actually very much of a split between your mind and your body. It has no body relevance. It's from the neck up is the feeling of it… it feels very contradictory and actually the opposite of what the term is supposed to be. (Sophia, p#5)
>
> I don't tend to use that term that much to start with, but I definitely follow it. I suppose the reason I don't use it a lot is that the term "nondual consciousness" as oppose to any other type of consciousness creates a dualism right there. (Laura, p#8)

Theme 2 of subcategory 1: Fluidity of terms.

"Fluidity of terms" refers to the fluidness with which participants use different terms, depending on content and context, as well as the use of metaphor and nonverbal gestures to refer to NDC. Coders identified this theme for all 8 participants. Coders identified this theme for 5 participants by the way in which they described how the terms they use change depending on context and content.

One example of this is seen in Judith's (p#3) description:

> Well, it kind of depends on who I'm speaking with. You know when I started writing about it and teaching it I called it "fundamental consciousness," and that was just like a term I coined or maybe I saw it somewhere, whatever, but that was the term I used and then when I began to really interact with the nondual community, I started to use the term "nondual consciousness," and it's really not the term they use either, they say, "use the term 'nondual awareness'." I don't really feel like that's sufficient. Of course we're really just trying to find a word in English for something we don't really have a word for. So, so these days I'm using the term "nondual consciousness."

Another example was offered by Robert (p#4):

> Sometimes I do refer to it as nondual awareness, and many variations as well, kind of depending on context and audience, who I'm speaking with and what we're exploring, so sometimes I'll, in a very simple way, refer to it as openness—or awareness without any sense of separation, alternative way of saying the same thing, nonseparate awareness.

Ellen (p#7) offered a third example in how she talked about how her use of terminology as a spiritual teacher changes in this way:

> The terms move. Because what I've discovered, and I'm sure if I'd been teaching even longer I'd be moving them around even more, when you use a certain term over and over and over again, people can't help but have some kind of an intellectual connection to the term and it so easily becomes just the word. So I kind of mix them up…so I think it's kind of important, at least from the role of being a teacher to shake up the terms…But I would tend to use those kind of terms that are more mysterious or vague.

Two participants directly spoke about or used nonverbal gestures or movement to describe their experience of NDC. Sophia (p#5) used physical movement to express her experience of NDC in the following way:

> When it's right, it's very exact. It can be (pause) I'll show you with my hand for a moment (does movement). This is the right movement in my hand, I don't know if you even saw it. At that moment it was the right movement. This is not the right movement (does a 2nd movement). That's the difference. And I think if you watch it carefully after a while, you can see the difference. You can see it very easily.

Ellen (p#7) expressed her use of nonverbal gestures to describe NDC in the following quote:

> I would often just use the term "this" or "mystery" or just use my hands, do you know, like (puts arms out to the sides), do you know, the wholeness of being, we could say, or we could just go (arms out to the sides).

Six participants made direct use of metaphors or talked about using metaphors as a way of describing NDC. The following quotes offer examples of some of the descriptive metaphors these participants used.

> I just see that it comes from a deep black hole. (Steven, p#2)

> The body being made of empty space and everything around me being made of empty space. (Judith, p#3)

> Often I'll find myself using the metaphor of space to speak of this. We are this space, everything is this space. (Robert, p#4)

> If you can imagine you're on water, in the water, you're not even on the ground, you're being held by water, the water moves in a way that you're body moves with it. If you let go and you're in the water, the water will move you. But if you're fighting the water because you think you're going to drown, then you're going to get all kind of movement that could even be beautiful swimming, but they're not following the water, they're fighting the water. (Sophia, p#5)

> It's almost like getting hit over the head, like lights out to the frontal lobe. (Ben, p#6)

> It's like deep sleep, but you're awake. (Ellen, p#7)

Theme 3 of subcategory 1: Relationship between words and experience.

Coders identified the theme "Relationship between words and experience" in 6 participants. This theme refers to statements made by participants in regards to the nature of using words and language as related to NDC. Several participants warned against equating words with the experience of NDC. Some participants, however, also suggested that words are important. The following quotes illustrate individual remarks made by participants.

> They [words] aren't [experience]. Yet, there's a way that they can carry it. I mean we are having a conversation (pause) in words, but also in silence (pause)… Either nothing could be said or there's no end to the speech. You could never say enough. There could be more. (Paul, p#1)

Anything we say is a story so (laughs), what we're going to do now is a story! (Steven, p#2)

Almost as I speak it's like wanting to erase it as quickly, because it's a representation. It's the mind's attempt to represent something that's prior to the mind, I would say. The mind is always dividing and creating categories and differentiating, and what's being described is undifferentiated… None of these words are it. So, even as we can share and have some understanding and feeling, it feels very important also to know that what we are speaking of is unspeakable, that it's prior to any differentiation that the mind can make, and it's important not to make it into some *thing.* So, it's very delicate, given the mind's attempt to grasp that which cannot be grasped. (Robert, p#4)

People don't really name it because it's actually quite unnamable and if they could have a way of using words that would fit for people I think that would actually enhance the experience in a way, like let people go, "oh, that's what I felt right now." (Sophia, p#5)

The use of language is kind of important to me just because I think that it's just so misused…we can't define nondual awareness and yet, if I were to try to define it I would say, awareness with no subject and no object, that would be a simple definition to me, about as good as I could get. Is that *it*? Like, what is it that has no subject and no object? Could I say? No, I can't. That's a total mystery. It's a total mystery. And yet here it is. Here it is. It's what we are basically. It's the absence of any—that's why the whole study *of* it—*be* it, that's all you can do…Any word you could use would not be it, not that any word you use is the thing anyway. (Ellen, p#7)

I think what the term points to, nonduality or nondual consciousness, is that which is beyond dualistic experience and nondualistic experience, which may sound confusing. It's outside of any opposites. So often we use a word to compare or contrast to another word or another term or state almost as a pointing to point out another view, but ultimately nonduality isn't even a view, not even like a perspective outside of thought. It's nonlocatable or definable… I feel like I forever fail with words, which is fine. It's not like a failing that—like I just don't even care about it. (Laura, p#8)

Subcategory 2 of primary category 1: Personal ideas regarding the nature of nondual consciousness.

The second subcategory found within the first primary category was: “Personal ideas regarding nondual consciousness.” Coders identified this subcategory in all 8 participants. This subcategory is related to the specific ideas or beliefs regarding the nature and experience of NDC which may or may not coincide with one’s actual experience of NDC. One major theme, one minor theme and five variant themes, representing the various ideas or beliefs that participant’s held about NDC, were found and are presented in Table 2 below. Major themes are those that were expressed by five or more participants; minor themes were expressed by 3-4 participants; and variant themes were those expressed by 1-2 participants. Narrative quotes from each participant are presented illustrating each of the themes he or she expressed. In this way, readers can see the ways in which participants expressed the themes in relation to one another. It should be noted that the following themes represent only those ideas or beliefs that participants clearly stated. Because no direct questions were asked in regards to participants ideas about NDC, it is likely that some participants share the ideas coded here, even if they did not overtly state so, or that there are many other ideas and beliefs that participants hold regarding the nature of NDC which were not explicitly stated and thus are not presented here.

Table 2

Participants' Ideas or Beliefs Regarding Nondual Consciousness

Theme #	*Idea or Belief*	*Percent of transcripts with theme*	*Participant #*
1	Actual experience of NDC is different than ideas	75	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8
2	NDC is easily confused conceptually	37.5	1, 2, 4
3	NDC is available to everyone	25	2, 5
4	Fully sustained NDC is rare	25	2, 4
5	People have natural capacities for NDC	12.5	1
6	Most people do not want NDC, just the qualities	12.5	7
7	The body has been overlooked in NDC	12.5	8

Author's image.

Paul (p#1), expressed three ideas regarding NDC. The first is illustrated in the following quote:

> Well the way that I understand it is that, that we have this capacity, we have this natural capacity, but it's obscured. (variant theme #5 "People have natural capacities for NDC")

Secondly, Paul described his belief that people tend to confuse NDC conceptually.

> There's a real danger for distorting some stuff that's been kept very pure, secret, very secret, and largely because it can be confused. Like, even what we're talking about, nondual state. That can be very easily confused with a mind state. Because it's not really a state of being. It is *being.* Not a *state* of being. Subtle distinction. (minor theme #2 "NDC is easily confused conceptually")

Finally, Paul described how his actual experience of NDC has been different than the idea that NDC is an altered state of some kind.

> There was a lot of talk about…being in an altered state, of somehow being beyond. And I realized, no this is not beyond, this is here, this is like so here, so completely present. So that was a very pivotal insight for me. (major theme #1 "Actual experience of NDC is different than ideas")

Steven (p#2), expressed four different ideas regarding NDC. The following quote illustrates two of these; the belief that NDC is available to everyone and that fully sustained NDC is rare:

> I think this understanding is so simple and when I go into a homeless shelter or any group or hospital I feel in ten or fifteen minutes I can introduce a person to this understanding. But their ability to hold it is absolutely zero, because all the conditioning just distracts away from it So, ideally, is this available to everybody? Absolutely. Is this already present to everybody? Absolutely. Is there anybody who doesn't already know this? No. How many people understand it? Very few. How many people, once they understand it, can abide in it? Very few (variant theme #3 "NDC is available to everyone" and variant theme #4 "Fully sustained NDC is rare")

Steven also expressed the idea that NDC is easily confused conceptually. This is seen in his description below:

> To understand intellectually what "nondual" is, or "consciousness," people confuse consciousness with the content from the larger aspect. "Awareness" gets confused with "I'm aware of" versus awareness itself. "Presence" gets confused with "I'm present" versus I'm being presence (minor theme #2 "NDC is easily confused conceptually").

Finally, in discussing his sense of the underlying "neutralness" of NDC, Steven expressed the way in which his actual experience has been different than ideas about NDC:

> Some people say that when they feel that kind of sameness they feel it's kind of bland, but for me it's not bland at all, it's very rich and alive and the neutralness of it feels very special, not like a desert—some people have described the feeling when they get into it like they're in the desert and there's just sameness everywhere and they don't like it. For me, I love it, it's great (laughs). I'll take the desert anytime (major theme #1 "Actual experience of NDC is different than ideas").

Judith (p#3), expressed one idea regarding NDC. In the following quote, she implies that some ideas are that NDC is a blissful state in which one no longer

experiences fear or a sense of self. As this quote illustrates, this is different from Judith's actual experience.

> I'm always in a state of nondual consciousness. I mean, I'm not experiencing like waves of bliss or anything, but I'm always in NDC as I understand that to be… But, you know, in terms of fearlessness? No! In terms of not being me? No! I really like being me. I like being me more than I did thirty years ago! (major theme #1 "Actual experience of NDC is different than ideas").

Robert (p#4), expressed three different ideas regarding NDC. The following quote illustrates his belief that fully sustained NDC is rare:

> It's very rare I think that people have openings to nondual awareness and that it's fully sustained. To me, I think it does happen, but it's pretty unusual. It's much more normal for there to be opening and then re-crystallizations that happen and then further reprocessing—certainly has been true in my case (variant theme #4 "Fully sustained NDC is rare").

In the next quote, Robert, talked about the conceptual confusion in discussions regarding NDC:

> Nonduality, I think, in its classic meaning… sometimes it's confused with the absence of polarities, that is to say that when one is in a deep meditative state there is no one and nothing and so people—the formless absolute is sort of casually referred to as the nondual. I think that this is an error, a subtle but important error that people commonly make because of course it leaves out phenomenal life. (minor theme #2 "NDC is easily confused conceptually")

Finally, Robert described how his actual experience of NDC is different than ideas regarding NDC:

> I mean sometimes this awareness is I think idealized in terms of bliss, ecstasy—I don't find that to be true (laughs) I don't know about you, I mean there are moments of that that come and go, but more it's rather quiet and subtle. (major theme #1 "Actual experience of NDC is different than ideas")

Sophia (p#5), expressed one idea regarding NDC which is that it is available to everyone. The following statement in which Sophia spoke in

reference to NDC was coded as such: “I think everybody has that feeling at some times” (variant theme #4 “NDC is available to everyone”).

Ben (p#6), expressed one idea regarding NDC regarding how his actual experience of NDC is different than ideas. He expressed this in the following quote:

> I think there’s this idea of what nonduality should be and I’m comparing it in my own experience even as we’re talking about it, like “I don’t think I’m quite there yet,” or “it’s not nondual all the time,” or like “I don’t feel one with everything, with my refrigerator, or whatever,” all the time. (major theme #1 “Actual experience of NDC is different than ideas”)

Ellen (p#7), expressed the idea that most people do not want NDC, just the qualities. She expressed this idea in the following quote:

> My experience as a teacher…is that most people aren’t really looking for the truth, they’re looking for the qualities, they’re looking for the qualities of clarity, love, compassion, wisdom, all of those things, as it moves, but not too many people are looking to disappear. (variant theme #6 “Most people do not want NDC, just the qualities”)

Laura (p#8), expressed the idea that the body has been overlooked in explorations of NDC. She expressed this in the following way:

> I’m really glad that you’re writing about this because I feel like that knowingness that registers in our body so clearly and beautifully has been overridden, or through what we’ve been taught and what we’ve been really conditioned to know either familiar conditioning or societal, what have you. (variant theme #7 “Body has been overlooked)

Subcategory 3 of primary category 1: Nondual consciousness as a process over time.

The third subcategory found within the first primary category is: “Nondual consciousness as a process over time.” Coders identified themes within this subcategory for all 8 participants. “Nondual consciousness as a process over time”

refers to the finding among participants, whether through their own experience or their understanding of NDC that the presence of NDC has emerged in their life within a context that could be defined as a process. The following statements illustrate some of the ways in which participants identified the presence of NDC in their lives as a gradual process over time.

> It's been a process. A journey, with various steps… Deepening is something that happens very gradually (Judith, p#3).

> There's an unfolding process happening (Robert, p#4).

> I feel like it has been a process. The process is going, it's coming down… for me it's been gradual (Ben, p#6).

Five themes, representing distinctly experienced aspects of this process, were identified: "Early experiences of nondual consciousness," "Stage of seeking nondual consciousness," "Experience of nondual consciousness although sense of separate self remains," "Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding nondual consciousness," and "Stabilization of nondual consciousness." These themes are listed in the basic chronological order that participants identified their occurrence over the course of their lives, although in some cases findings suggest these might occur in a different order or simultaneously for some individuals.

It should be noted that each of these themes were not necessarily found among all 8 participants. This finding may be due to certain experiences not occurring for everyone, or simply that certain experiences were not present or as noteworthy for each participant, or could not be assumed to have taken place by participant's descriptions. Additionally, some participants identified themes related to their process that only they described, meaning they may be

idiosyncratic in nature or simply stated by them, but not others. These themes are identified in the following narratives, however were not included in the final coding template.

It was found that, in general, participants who expressed themes which occurred chronologically later, such as theme #5 “Stabilization of nondual consciousness,” expressed many of the earlier themes as well. In other words, the findings suggest that theme #5 represents a developmentally later experience in which one has experienced many if not all of the earlier themes identified. This finding offers support to the notion that the emergence of NDC in one’s life is a developing process. With that said, the following themes may also be more fluid and intertwining than suggested here, and themes within this process may be experienced in different ways, for different durations of time, for each individual. Because each theme was not expressed by every participant, only tentative conclusions can be drawn. Further exploration of the meaning of these themes, their relationship to one another and to the process of NDC itself will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The following table shows the distribution of each theme among participants. Following presentation of the table each theme is briefly described. Narrative examples of how these themes were expressed by each individual participant are then offered. Themes are presented within each participant narrative instead of separately, in an effort to retain the essence of each participant’s description of their experience of NDC.

Table 3

Subcategory 3: Nondual Consciousness as a Process Over Time

Theme #	*Theme*	*Percent of Transcripts with Theme*	*Participant #*
1	Early experiences of nondual consciousness	100	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2	Stage of seeking nondual consciousness	75	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
3	Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains	75	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
4	Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC	37.5	2, 7, 8
5	Stabilization of nondual consciousness	50	2, 3, 7, 8

Author's image.

Five themes regarding nondual consciousness as a process over time.

The first theme regarding NDC as a process over time is "Early experiences of nondual consciousness." This theme refers to the first experiences, generally occurring early on in one's life, that participants identified as significantly related to their overall process and current experience of NDC. Coders identified this theme for all 8 participants.

The second theme regarding NDC as a process over time is "Stage of seeking nondual consciousness." This theme refers to a stage in time identified by participants in which they actively sought out NDC. Coders identified this theme by participants' descriptions of behaviors they currently engage in or have utilized in the past, with the primary intention of seeking out and/or maintaining the experience of NDC. Participant descriptions coded as "Stage of seeking NDC" reflect either an entire stage, period of time or specific experiences or behaviors within a period of time. Additionally, some participants also identified an end to a

stage of seeking and this is coded under this theme as well as it was determined by coders to reflect an aspect of the stage itself. Coders identified this theme for 6 participants.

The third theme regarding NDC as a process over time is "Experience of nondual consciousness although sense of separate self remains." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of experiencing a sense of inner dualism in the form of a separate self at the same time as they experience NDC. The expression of a "separate self" was illustrated by participants' descriptions of experiencing an internal "witness" or inner observer of their experience, as well as reference to feeling like their experience of NDC was in some way separate or divided from their sense of self. Coders identified this theme for 6 participants.

The fourth theme regarding NDC as a process over time is "Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding nondual consciousness." This theme relates to participants' descriptions of experiencing doubt or uncertainty in regards to their experience of NDC. This theme was coded for participants' expression of their uncertainty about the validity of their experience, the stability of their experience, or expressions of doubt or fear regarding the process of their experience. Coders identified this theme for 3 participants.

The fifth theme regarding NDC as a process over time is "Stabilization of nondual consciousness." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of a stage in which NDC has become stabilized in their experience. Participants expressed this theme in describing their experience and awareness of NDC as something which no longer fluctuates as an isolated experience in time, but has integrated or

stabilized. Although participants' experiences may include descriptions of NDC shifting in intensity or quality, this theme was coded for participants who described their experience of NDC as a fully integrated awareness, versus an isolated experience. Coders identified this theme for 4 participants.

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #1: Paul.

Coders identified one distinct theme ("Early experiences of nondual consciousness") in Paul's description of the process of NDC in his life. The following composite quote illustrates Paul's experience:

> The first time I got an experience that I really registered because I really was paying attention, aside from all those things, all the times that were present like when we're kids, we just kind of don't notice it. We go from being really at oneness to being completely distraught, it can happen like that quickly. Aside from all that, a Vipassana retreat I was on when I was in my 20s with [meditation teacher], I was in a rough spot so she sat up with me through the night just eye to eye and somewhere in the night just everything dropped for me. And it was just incredibly present, very bliss—I would say bliss, not so much maybe like joy, like jazzy, just very deep peace and bliss…Everything just fell away and opened…It was very definitely felt. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #2: Steven.

Coders identified all five distinct themes in Steven's description of the gradual process of NDC in his life: "Early experiences of NDC," "Stage of seeking NDC," "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains," "Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC," and "Stabilization of NDC." The following quote illustrates how Steven's early experiences of NDC contributed to him feeling different from others, and this being a challenging

experience. This quote also illustrates something alluded to by several participants that may have something to do with the developmental experience of transitioning from a pre-egoic to egoic state early in life:

> I can go way back to when I was, I was walking and I was talking, so I don't know how old I am, maybe two. But there's a moment where my sister appears, the room appears, windows appear, the door appears, light appears. The sense of separation just comes in. That was deeply registered. At the moment there was no sense of what it meant, but there was a registration of a sense of difference from my surroundings, something just like came on line. And I think with that a sense of self consciousness, so an awareness of other, so a beginning awareness of self consciousness. And probably like most people in the Western world, or in the Eastern world too, I grew up in a family that didn't understand that so I had no one to reflect with or have it reflected back and so after a while I think I felt like I was a strange animal amongst the wrong tribe…when I would get around my own kind there was always a sense of estrangement or some resonance that just didn't feel right. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Steven described a second experience coded as "Early experiences of NDC," however in this example he is re-experiencing something that he remembered experiencing even earlier:

> When I was 13 I had an extraordinary experience of being on vacation and lying down one night and looking up at the sky, the evening stars and wondering where the end of the universe was. And in my 13 year old mind I formulated a brick wall and I said, "ah, it's the end of the universe," and of course then I said, "I wonder what's on the other side of the brick wall," and then I jumped over and I came to another brick wall, jumped over, came to another brick wall, jumped over. And I kept doing that over and over and over again, just in a playful way, I wasn't doing anything other than that simple inquiry, "yeah I wonder where the end of the universe is." And there was a moment where the whole thing collapsed and I would say that, what I know now, as mystery, flooded in, took me back to my childhood and… just totally blew out all sense of separation momentarily and then I got up and walked back into my 13 year old life, not really understanding what had just happened, but still feeling that sense of estrangement. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Steven went on to describe how this experience did not come back to him again until his early 20s, at which point it registered differently than it had in these earlier experiences. As seen in the following quote, the early experience of NDC that Steven described ushered in a stage of seeking.

> When I came out here in 1970 I was trying to meet people so someone said, “why don’t you take a yoga class.” So I took a yoga class…and again that sense of the universe melting away its difference and sense of explosion into a sense of oneness came rushing back. And I remember walking out after that evening feeling again as I had felt it as a 13 year old, just no sense of boundary present. (theme #1 “Early experiences of NDC”)
>
> So in that moment I remember deeply registering it as a very significant moment, this is what I want to, this is what I’m looking for and I think I have found something that can help me come back to this… How do I find this, this experience that I was having, so that it stays? (theme #2 “Stage of seeking NDC”)

As with several other participants, the stage of seeking in which Steven pursued NDC, came to include some distinctly experienced landmarks in his process. Firstly, Steven’s stage of seeking included studying with various teachers and engaging in a deep meditation practice. One experience described by Steven, but not necessarily unique to him, was his experience that the teachings he connected to in his seeking would eventually get in the way of him finding what he was looking for. This is seen in the following quote:

> What I kept feeling was that the teachings themselves got in the way. So I found over and over I would go very deeply into a particular community, even try to join it, and then it would, I would come to kind of the end of it. I would realize, this isn’t it.

Another distinct experience described by Steven is related to him eventually meeting Jean Klein, who he identified as his teacher. Through his study with Klein, Steven described several themes in his experience, illustrated in the

following quotes. In the first quote Steven described his experience of NDC, although a separate sense of self remained.

> So in a way he [Klein] helped me stop, not give up what I was doing, but some internal stop, to really see that the striving itself was getting in the way… and it started a long phase of feeling into the emptiness, the inherent emptiness of everything. But over here a very strong sense of Me as separate from all that emptiness. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

In the next quote, Steven referred to feelings of doubt and uncertainty regarding his experience of NDC:

> And one night I was awakened and I got up and just sat by the door looking out…I was just sitting there and all I can say is just something very politely, very quietly, announced itself. And the best thing I could say was it said, "Oh, I got it." And…the best way of saying it was, some belief that I didn't believe this was it just had dissolved…and so that started a whole new movement I would say of doubt beginning to be inquired into. (theme #4 "Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC")

Steven went on to describe how in his process he experienced the dissolution of his feelings of doubt as well as an end to his seeking:

> And that inquiry went on I would say for almost two years. No change in the understanding, but the doubt still in place…. And Jean died and I went, called up a friend of mine, said, "I'd like you to do something," he said, "sure," I said, "I want you to play Jean Klein for me and I'm going to ask you a question, but I don't want you to say anything. Keep your mouth shut. I just want to ask you a question." He said, "okay." So I said, "Jean, I've had this understanding." And, I couldn't open my mouth because what happened then is that, in that moment the doubt just dissolved and I would say, the understanding affirmed itself and the desire to look out for its affirmation kind of like, dissolved. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC" and theme #4 "Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC")

Finally, Steven described how his experience of NDC currently in his life is that it has stabilized, meaning, for him, that it does not ever go away as it had previously.

> And now I find it's got its own ebb and flow. Sometimes it comes more foreground, but it never goes into the background. It stays permeated in the foreground, but sometimes just very polite. (theme #5 "Stabilization of NDC")

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #3: Judith.

Coders identified three distinct themes in Judith's description of the process of NDC in her life: "Early experiences of NDC," "Stage of seeking NDC," and "Stabilization of NDC." The following quote illustrates Judith's early experiences of NDC:

> I started my life as a professional dancer and I started performing when I was around nine.... So, during that time that I was performing I had a sense that I—had a sense of a kind of numinous presence, like in the sky actually, that I could feel. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")
>
> I was always hypersensitive and very responsive, you know that's just how I was. But I couldn't—I would lose myself in people and would kind of become whatever I saw—I had that kind of sensitivity and it made me feel very awkward, it wasn't a good thing particularly. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Judith described how this sense of numinous presence, which she felt she could draw into herself, was felt to be lost after an injury. As with other participants, this loss ushered in a period of seeking for Judith.

> I injured my back quite badly and I had to have surgery and so forth, and after that surgery, I guess I was 27, I no longer was able to do that. I no longer was able to pull that numinous presence inside of me and it was a really big loss. And so at that point I started on actual spiritual work. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")

Following this injury, Judith described a journey in which she visited India several times, studied with a number of different teachers, and engaged in numerous spiritual practices. In the following quote, Judith described an experience which occurred during her period of seeking NDC that she had while

living at a Zen center for a year, in which she reconnected with what she had believed she had lost:

> While at the Zen monastery which was extremely rigorous practice, you know daily practice, I would sneak out in the afternoons and go…sit at the creek…and I began to notice that the rocks, that everything was weightless and then…I realized at that time that I no longer had to pull that presence inside of me, that that's not really what it was, that it was already inside and outside at the same time.

Finally, Judith described how she is no longer seeking, an experience coded in connection with the theme "Stage of seeking NDC," and her experience of NDC has stabilized:

> For me, that space is ongoing, so, I'm always in a state of nondual consciousness… I stabilized it. You know as a dancer I didn't have that all clear-through experience I just had enough openness that I could kind of pull what seemed like this kind of numinous presence inside of me, that's really pretty different. And then when I was living at the Zen center that year… I had like kind of spectacular peak experiences of that oneness before it became an ongoing experience. So it all happened that year I think, that it really went through… the experience of nondual consciousness I have had for a long time, so I'm not really concerned with doing things to achieve that. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC" and theme #4 "Stabilization of NDC")

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #4: Robert.

Coders identified three distinct themes in Robert's description of the gradual process of NDC in his life: "Early experiences of NDC," "Stage of seeking," "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains." For Robert, his early experiences, expressed in the following quote, were extremely pleasurable:

> I think there have been intuitions of this awareness. The first intuition of it was when I was a boy, kind of pre-adolescent and…there were a couple of years when most nights when I would start falling asleep I would enter into a reverie or hypnagogic state and I would feel on a sensate level my

> body felt like it would become infinitely condensed and small and then it would alternate and become infinitely spacious and expansive. And it was like an ebb and flow, the felt sense would be like this infinitely small, infinitely large and I had no idea what was going on, but it was extremely pleasurable and I never talked to anyone about it and it went on for probably two to three years. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Robert went on to describe how this experience as well as other early experiences of NDC brought in a stage of seeking in his early 20s:

> The second time I sat in meditation doing mantra that spacious—that kind of infinitely big space opened again and it was like, "oh, wow, there it is!" (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")
>
> So I was twenty at the time...I became an ardent meditator at that point and got into a kind of seeking mode (laughs). I want that. I want to go back there. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")

Robert described a seeking that began for him in which he became a devotee of several spiritual teachers and a variety of teachings and in which he experienced several "awakenings" to different insights. The following quotes illustrate this process and these insights and their corresponding themes. In this first quote, Robert described an experience, alluded to by several other participants as well, in which he came to recognize that what he had been seeking was the seeker himself and to the experience of still feeling that a separate sense of self was witnessing or observing his experience. The first aspect of this quote was coded in relation to "Stage of seeking NDC." The second aspect was coded in regards to the theme "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains."

> I practiced meditation. I became a TM teacher, stopped becoming a TM teacher, became a Sai Baba devotee…Went to India, spent time with Sai Baba, encountered the teaching of Ramana Maharshi …and was exposed to the teachings of Nissargadata Maharaj …So I read, 'I am That,' and that was really a transformation for me because I realized that the seeker is what is really sought and I was still looking as though it was really outside of me… there was still a divided—a division. There was a sense of being

> "the witness" and of witnessing something, everything else. That's what actually and I knew it, but I couldn't, I wasn't able to free myself of that. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC" and theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

Although Robert described his experience of NDC as "non-abiding" meaning that it "fluctuates" and has not completely stabilized, he did describe a process by which NDC has integrated in him over time. The following experiences illustrate the way that Robert has had experiences that are codable in reference to themes described by other participants, however, in some cases they have been isolated temporary experiences. For example, in the following quote Robert described an experience related to the theme of experiencing NDC although a sense of separate self remains. In this quote Robert described the experience of this separate sense of self-disappearing. For Robert, this was an experience that came and went:

> When I was on retreat in 1987…there was an initial glimpse I would call it…an implosion of the center and it was just gone for, I don't know, most of the night, maybe 6 hours or so. But there was really perception free of any illusion of a seer and a sense of the infinite, call it a taste of freedom and then wooosh—the lens closed again. And there was a knowing at that point that it couldn't be held on to or recreated, but it was the clearest opening since when I was 20…It was like, okay, this is it—this is clearly it. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

Again, Robert described an experience later in his life in which this internal sense of self dissolved once more. He described it as a "mental awakening:"

> And then I met Adya… and…I was invited to attend a private retreat with him…and I was sitting with him and this little voice just said, "finish me, finish me off." And I had never, never heard this voice before. It just welled up from the core of my being, "finish me off," it was totally spontaneous. So I raised my hand and said, "Adya, this voice is arising."…And I looked in his eyes and suddenly I was looking in the eyes of the infinite. It was like woosh, total infinity looking at me and then (snaps fingers) I realized this is also infinity looking out. And it was like getting hit by a lightning bolt, I mean there was just like this boom, sense

> of being struck by something… there was some kind of veil that was there and that was the veil, that subtle witness, and that subtle witness was just like cut through in that exchange with Adya. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

As his process deepened, Robert described how his seeking came to an end:

> And so again on retreat with Adya, this was much subtler, there was a realization that some seeking was still happening and that I had not acknowledged that in my self so I had been lying and so I saw the lie of that and I saw the lie of the seeking. That the seeking is endless, that it would never be satisfied….There's a sense of fullness here, wholeness, everything is complete now. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")

In the following quote Robert suggested that, although there has been an experience of an unfolding movement of NDC in his life, there is more to go:

> All of this is a movement down…and yet I think that there's, it feels like there's further unfolding that will happen as well. It feels like kind of an evolution or further movement of deepening as well.

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #5: Sophia.

Coders identified two distinct themes in Sophia's description of the gradual process of NDC in her life: "Early experiences of NDC" and "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains." Like several other participants, Sophia described her early experiences of NDC as something that could be difficult at times:

> I can't remember any time in childhood not being in that experience [NDC]. And I think what was really actually very difficult about going to school was the expectation that you're not supposed to be in that experience…So I spent the first few years of school being in that experience all the time until they decided that I had to go to a special class (laughs) for the people who had to get their shit together! And that was like a turning point where I realized that unless I went along with that that things were not going to go along well. So I made, then I made that choice that I was going to make sure that the world outside would get exactly what they needed so that they could leave me alone because that part

> wasn't going so well…I think that, I knew that that wasn't the way everyone was. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Sophia described how her early experiences of NDC eventually became registered as something positive, and how as a result, an inner part of her that could watch, and modulate, her experience developed. The development of this inner observing part is an example of a separate sense of self along with the experience of NDC.

> I mean I would go in and out of those spaces…when I was a kid, I was in that other space most of the time and I would pull out of it to function in a way. But… in…graduate school, I began to feel that the people who were supervising me were saying, "oh, you really know what you're doing." And I think it was that then I could watch the whole process in a kind of, the word benign comes up for me for some reason… like, oh, so this is really meaningful and this is really important...that's when it began to show up as a very benign kind of—you know, positive thing. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")
>
> But there's another thing that also happens that I find which is this observing part that can watch what's happening. So, if I'm sitting with a client or I'm now in that space in myself, I have an observing part that's also watching on some level, that can monitor, you know, and know how to enter, how much is too much, you know, to keep—there's that other piece that wasn't there for me when I was a kid. There was no monitoring piece there as a kid. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #6: Ben.

Coders identified four distinct themes in Ben's description of the gradual process of NDC in his life: "Early experiences of NDC," "Stage of seeking," "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains," and "Experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC." Ben began by describing one of his early experiences of NDC in the following statement: "I started meditating when I was 14, 15 or 16. And I just knew that there was a sense of the truest thing that I could

feel" (theme #1 "Early experience of NDC"). Ben went on to describe how he reconnected with this experience in his early 20s, but then lost it. As with other participants, Ben implied in the following quote, that this loss brought with it a stage of seeking:

> I felt a little bit, a dose of this when I was 21, 22. And then—the dark night of the soul for, I don't know, 8 years or so… so that's what I was really after, the truest thing, that sense of… I could feel that really strong when I was 21 or 22…During that dark night of the soul, I was trying to achieve what I had lost, what I had felt, and there was a lot of achieving in that...I would try and manipulate sensations in the body and, but there was a desperation to it, to that energy, that was behind it. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")

Ben described how he reconnected with this sense of truth again in his 30s when he became acquainted with the teachings of Adyashanti and other spiritual teachers. Similar to other participants' descriptions related to the theme of experiencing NDC although a sense of separate self remains, Ben talked about his experience of an inner observer as a part of his current experience.

> For me in my own process I still have the observer that's right at my third eye and that's pretty, hypervigilant…And… there's a belief there around safety, around-is it safe…It's almost like a sticking point, there's a tension, a tightness there. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

The following quote, also coded earlier as an idea that Ben holds about the nature of NDC, is an example of Ben's experience of doubt and uncertainty of his experience:

> I think there's this idea of what ND should be and I'm comparing it in my own experience even as we're talking about it, like "I don't think I'm quite there yet," or "it's not ND all the time." (Theme #4 "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC")

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #7: Ellen.

Coders identified all five distinct themes in Ellen's description of NDC as a process over time in her life: "Early experiences of NDC," "Stage of seeking," "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains," "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding experience of NDC," and "Stabilization of nondual consciousness."

In her description of her experience Ellen distinguished between what she described as her experience of "awakenings" and "being awake." For Ellen, "awakenings" are experiences that "profoundly deliver the message" of NDC, but do not "sustain" themselves. As determined by the coding team, these experiences have been coded as "Early experiences of nondual consciousness." Ellen described her process of awakening and the experience of being awake in the following quotes. The following statement by Ellen suggests that she had experiences related to NDC from an early age, but that in retrospect she can also see, similar to other participants in which a separation between her sense of self and her experience remained:

> I had this relationship it felt like with the divine within from the time I was a kid so that was around, but it was always like it was out there. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC" and theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

Ellen described several encounters with teachers and teachings in her journey, within which she continued to have early experiences of NDC. One of these is described in the following quote where Ellen also refers to her first awakening.

> A few years before what I would call that first awakening Ramana Maharshi just appeared in a dream and I had no idea who that was, if he was dead or alive, what he stood for, but I felt so compelled to begin to

> read the spiritual teachings of Ramana Maharshi and…I just felt as I was reading that I was in the presence of the deepest truth I had ever encountered. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Although Ellen described her process as a private one, she did describe a period of seeking:

> For me it was a very private thing, I mean I meditated, I chanted, I prayed, and lit all of the candles and bells and things like that that the seeker has, but it was very much unto myself. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")

Ellen described how following her exposure to the teachings of Maharshi she spontaneously began a process of self-inquiry in which questions would arise inside of her. This led to her first awakening:

> I started doing self-inquiry… not on a formal basis, it would just happen. It would be like we're sitting here and then the question would just come up, "who's looking at this person?" or, "who's seeing herself in the store window?" or, "who's anxious right now?" … It felt like it was just spontaneous…and after 3 years of that, what I would say is that the mind finally got quiet enough to receive what it has always been…its true nature. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Prior to this awakening, Ellen experienced some uncertainty. Ellen described her experience of what seems to be fear suggested by the following quote, which was also coded as "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC:"

> Before what I would call the first awakening whenever there were times where in meditation, I would feel like something's about to be delivered off the edge of the cliff, I remember I would just like I would pray to all of the Gods I knew to save me. (Theme #4 "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC")

The following quote illustrates how Ellen's first awakening marked the ending of her seeking NDC, and the disappearance of any doubt or uncertainty she had experienced.

> That moment happened [first awakening] and there was just this sense of knowing that, you know, I mean if I had died that day I would have died

> feeling complete, that's how it felt, like the seeking ended at that point. It just felt like it, like it was ended. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC," and theme #4 "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC")

In the following quotes, Ellen described how, even after this awakening it was clear to her that NDC had not become fully embodied. Several themes are identified here and Ellen's description of her experience illustrates the overall nature of her experience of stabilization of NDC, or "being awake," as she puts it:

> But, what wasn't happening [after the first awakening] to the extent that I now know is possible was that *this* wasn't really dancing. It wasn't functioning in a deeper or more spontaneous way that's possible when it's just more fully embodied. (theme #5 "Stabilization of NDC")

Ellen described how in this deepening, her experience of a separate sense of self dissolved:

> So, it was really after meeting Adya… that what happened was more… moments of just complete stopping of the mind… where the mind wasn't thinking and there would just be what is, without any interpretation, without any liking or disliking, and that was extremely powerful… To me that was… another awakening. It was a deepening. It was like there was that sense of, I am *that*, but then after that... it was just a ceasing of experience you could say, and yet, not a ceasing of something, but there was a sense of, this is what's here before I think, it can't even be aware of itself. That was the sense, that this awareness is not aware of itself. Its first movement to be aware is what I would call consciousness. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

As Ellen continued describing this experience, she also illustrated her sense that the experience of an internal witness, or separate sense of self, may be a part of the process:

> There's a stage of this whole process where there may be an experience of witnessing from back here or outside or whatever, but that eventually disappears as well and then there's just this (puts hand out) whatever is here. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")

Subcategory 3 as expressed by participant #8: Laura.

Coders identified all five distinct themes in Laura's description of the gradual process of NDC in her life: "Early experiences of NDC," "Stage of seeking," "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains," "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding experience of NDC," and "Stabilization of nondual consciousness." Laura referred to early experiences of NDC, as other participants did, in describing what may be pre-egoic experiences:

> There were certainly, in my early years of childhood, I could say that it was present without registering it in thought or in mind, registering it consciously, and I was not yet adopting sort of a more dualistic view or a more egocentric view, but I didn't have the ability in those infant or toddler years to reflect on it in any way. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Laura described several important junctures that brought her to the point of her first significant experience of NDC. The following experience, although not necessarily unique to Laura, was not described by other participants and so was not coded by one of the five themes within this subcategory. This experience is connected to a theme for Laura related to the questioning of her entire spiritual path:

> There were certain junctures that were more pivotal. I mean probably the biggest one being one…was I went to see Gangaji and she was talking about getting on the boat of truth. And you know, if the boat of truth comes by, get on it….And I just said, "but what if you don't want to get on the boat of truth. Like what if it keeps coming by and you just want it to leave you alone, like you just want to be normal." And I was like at the time, you got to take it in context, it was me at 26 or something…But anyway, so you know she kind of fiercely looked at me and she said, "you make the choice." And it was very cutting at the time, but just sort of basically, stop your excuses and get on with it. And it was like a sheer revolution in my life. It was so cutting to me, and I'm a pretty sensitive person…And it brought my whole spiritual life into question. All the ways

> I was holding out or putting off or waiting or on the fence. And it was kind of like an inner, not just an inner house cleaning, but upheaval for a good five months. And just a complete dissolution of everything I thought I was supposed to believe, every tradition I thought I was supposed to be part of, every ism, everything I just thought that I was sold, just bought just something to believe in. It rocked my world.

Laura described how following this upheaval she became a student of Adyashanti's, and on a retreat with him in her late 20s she had one of her first significant experiences of NDC. In this experience, what she had experienced earlier in her life registered in her consciousness in a different way than it had previously:

> There was just a big shift in my experience during that retreat, like just a huge shift of consciousness…that's when there was a conscious knowing that this, however you want to call it, that there was a conscious seeing basically that there's only one thing happening, it's not even really happening, but it's hard to put into words…that the person who I took myself to be fundamentally didn't exist as a separate self outside of the thought, and that what remained is something that can never be divided. And it wasn't other than I am or that anything is. That kind of hit my human consciousness in that retreat and as much as the human consciousness can register that… And then in that moment it was like, "oh my gosh, this is all that's ever been!" And I could look back and see that it had always been so, but I was just busy concluding something else in my thoughts. But I'd have to say that it wasn't conscious before that moment, in anyway that it registered in human consciousness or thought. (theme #1 "Early experiences of NDC")

Laura went on to talk about how this fundamental knowing has been with her ever since, but that there was a time that separate sense of self remained along with her experience of NDC, and she also had some doubt regarding her experience:

> So that conscious knowing has been there since and to say, "has it always been there since then," well, it couldn't be otherwise although my mind had at certain stages been preoccupied with some inner division or identification. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")
>
> After that [experience], the knowingness never left. Just that fundamental knowingness has always registered in my system since then.

> You know, it would only take a pause out of the thought to know that. At the beginning I checked it thousands of times until I was like, okay this is silly. (theme #4 "Feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding experience of NDC")

In further discussing her experience on retreat with Adyashanti, Laura described a 2- day period of time in which several important changes occurred. These are seen in the following composite quotes:

> I was meditating on the question, "what is stillness" I guess I could just say that probably the first kind of thing that struck me…just in a very ordinary way was, like I exhausted this question, "what is stillness"…I basically scanned the inside and the outside to answer—to receive the answer to that question…And at a certain point like any other tracking, looking, monitoring, efforting, sitting in meditation just felt like the opposite of stillness. It felt like some sort of seeking. (theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")
>
> And just something inside was just like…this is enough. In a sense it marked a moment of no more seeking, in a sense. (Theme #2 "Stage of seeking NDC")

Laura went on to describe how, in this experience, her sense of a separate self along with her experience of NDC disappeared:

> I just got up and went to bed, laid down…It was like I went into some—I don't even know what to call it, kind of formless state. I was awakened by the bell and there was no self-reflection happening. Like I almost can't even remember what happened, it was so sort of like not being recorded in memory. And I barely remember the sound of the bell and getting up, and I know I was a retreat leader and I know I did was I was supposed to do, all of the tasks I had that morning. But there was very little sense of myself in the whole morning, but I didn't even know at the time. It didn't strike me because there was nobody there to be recorded by…And then as the day went on it was, it just kind of registered that all sense of self, sense of a me that I had carried for so long, was just evaporated. (theme #3 "Experience of NDC although sense of separate self remains")
>
> There were many, many things that happened in succession in a period of a couple days, but I think that the shifts that took place then were definite hallmarks of what altered my reality, perception forever. (theme #5 "Stabilization of NDC")

Subcategory 4 of primary category 1: Supports for nondual consciousness.

Coders identified the subcategory of "Supports for nondual consciousness," in all 8 participants. This subcategory refers specifically to external factors which provided support for the emergence of NDC in one's life. These factors were identified either by participants themselves, or the coding team, to be significant in the experience of NDC over the course of one's life. Data within this subcategory clustered into two themes, each representing a different type of support: "External guidance" and "Practices." Each theme is described below with supporting narrative data.

Theme 1 of subcategory 4: External Guidance.

Coders identified this theme for all 8 participants. "External guidance" refers to external factors that have been important in guiding and supporting the experience of NDC in a participant's life. Coders identified this theme in at least one of two ways illustrated by the following subthemes: Role of teacher(s) and Role of teaching(s).

Although subthemes are presented separately, in most cases, these two types of external guidance were intertwined. For example, a participant who identified the role of a teacher as a significant support to their experience of NDC may also connect the role of teachings with that teacher. Table 4 shows the distribution of subthemes within this theme across all participants. Following are narrative examples illustrating each subtheme.

Table 4

Types of External Guidance Supporting the Experience of Nondual Consciousness

Subtheme	*Percent of transcripts with subtheme*	*Participant #*
Role of teacher(s)	100	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Role of teaching(s)	87.5	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8

Author's image.

Subtheme 1—Role of teacher(s): All 8 participants identified the role of teachers as an important support in their experience of NDC. In the following quote, Judith (p#3) described the importance of one of her teachers in helping her understand what she was already experiencing:

> He was extremely helpful to me. Really I think he saved my life in those early years. And what he did was love me. And not just love, like you could love everybody. He looked at *me* with a lot of recognition… And that was incredibly healing for me... And then of course he also taught Vedanta in a very palatable way…And so I had a way to understand what I was experiencing and what I was already beginning to experience at that time. So that was extremely helpful, there's no underestimating that.

Sophia (p#5) also identified the role of teachers, in her case, supervisors, as being important in helping her recognize her own experience as something positive. The following quote was also presented in the previous section as an illustration of one of Sophia's first registered experiences of NDC:

> It really began in…graduate school, I began to feel that the people who were supervising me were saying, "oh, you really know what you're doing." And I think it was that then I could watch the whole process in a kind of, the word benign comes up for me for some reason… like, oh, so this is really meaningful and this is really important...that's when it [NDC] began to show up as a very benign kind of—you know, positive thing.

Another example is offered by Robert (p#4), who talked about how he was able to experience NDC in the presence of one of his teachers, although he was not able to sustain the experience on his own at the time:

> [Teacher] was a very awake being and a very skillful teacher. A lot of the teaching was in silence and I would just sit with him and I would feel through the presence that we're talking about and sharing today, but it wasn't an integrated experience at all. It was only when I was around him or on retreat that I would feel [NDC].

Steven (p#2) offered a similar example of experiencing guidance from a teacher, but not being able to sustain the experience on his own:

> When we would sit together on occasions, that background would flood foreground with her in my presence. Because she had a very very strong unitive understanding as I understand it now, not then. So through her guidance I would say I began to really have more and more experiences where that background moved foreground, but I knew that I didn't know how to do it, because it would come unbidden even though I may be trying to make it happen, I knew that I didn't have a clue.

Several participants talked about teachers appearing to them in dreams or visions. For example, as briefly shown in the previous section describing participants' process of experiencing NDC, Ellen (p#7) talked about how the teacher Ramana Maharshi came to her in a dream, leading to her reading his spiritual teachings.

Robert (p#4) also described more than one experience of having a teacher come to him in a dream or vision. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> [I] became a Sai Baba devotee when I had a profound vision of him... [I] Went to India, spent time with Sai Baba … and was exposed to the teachings of Nissargadata Maharaj… shortly before he died. I didn't know who he was, but he came in a dream and the dream became as real a meeting as this and he said, "I know you're a devotee of Sai Baba, but you can spend some time with me." And there was a lucid awakening in the so-called dream and I awoke and was like, "who was that?" And I asked a

> friend who had been to India and actually spent time with him and he showed me a picture and I said, "that's who came," and Nissargadata passed away two months later.

Subtheme 2—Role of teaching(s): Seven participants identified the role of teachings to be important supports in their experience of NDC. As previously described, Ellen (p#7) found the teachings of Ramana Maharshi to be important as a support. A second example is offered by Ben (p#6) who described the role of teachings as a catalyst for his experience of NDC. This is seen in the following quote:

> It happens when I pick up a book, like Adyashanti, or another nondual teacher… I'll read it and I'll hit a particular point of truth that really resonates for me and that's when I'll like drop out.

In the following statement, Paul (p#1) suggested that the teachings that he was drawn to within particular contexts were an important support for his experience of NDC: "I was already kind of into the New Age scene and into the Dharma and all of that." He went on to describe how many of the other supports to his experience, namely various practices which will be discussed in the next section, came out of his connection to "the New Age scene" and "the Dharma." Finally, the listing of past and current religious/spiritual traditions on the demographic questionnaires also suggests that certain teachings have been important supports for participants' experiences of NDC.

It is of note that only 1 participant, Sophia (p#5), did not express the subtheme "Role of teaching(s)" in her interview. It is also of note that Sophia is the only participant who did not describe any connection with nondual teachers or teachings in describing her experience of NDC, although she was familiar with

the term and the experience as described by this researcher. Interestingly, a theme that was uniquely expressed by Sophia several times in her interview was her desire to be met or seen, and the fear that arises for her in the context of her experience of NDC. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> I think… my struggle has been…I don't really feel like I have allowed anyone to witness me properly, let's just say it that way. So I've never felt really met in that [NDC], so this is something I practice, I do by myself. But my feeling is that I also… have sometimes this incredible internal struggle and terror of really letting myself drop into those places…that feels like it could go so deeply and kind of unravel in some way … I think one of the hard parts for me…is really not having a group I'm part of and…feeling so completely unseen.

This quote is presented here because of its relationship to the subcategory of "Supports for nondual consciousness." As suggested by several participants, one of the benefits of having experienced the role of teachers and teachings is having their experience of NDC reflected, held, or enhanced in some way. These are experiences that Sophia has not fully had and expresses a desire for.

Theme 2 of subcategory 4: Practices.

Coders identified the theme "Practices" for all 8 participants. This theme refers to activities that participants identified as having been used specifically in the context of supporting their experience of NDC. As illustrated by narrative data presented here, the ways in which participants described how practices support their experience of NDC varied. However, in regards to the specific criteria for which this theme was coded, all 8 participants identified practices that they currently engage in, and which they themselves describe as a "practice," not merely an activity. The following quotes illustrate some of the comments that

participants made regarding their thoughts and personal experiences regarding practices. Following these quotes, a table listing all of the different practices that participants identified is presented.

For Paul (p#1) practices are essential. He described his experience in the following quote:

> I have found it very useful to practice. Various practices, particularly Dzogchen practices, but also a number of them, different ones, to access nondual awareness. And then to rest in it for however long I can, and then come back and rest and come back and rest. And so I suppose that's what's happened over all these years. That I spend more time orienting myself to the unconditioned and then finding myself there, relaxing, to strengthen my capacity for sustaining presence. And I find that it's cumulative. You get out of it what you put in it. So that's how I found it, I know there are nondual teachers out there that say, "Oh, you know, what is there to sustain? What is the path? Where is there to go?" And those are all really good points, but for me it's been absolutely essential that I practice…I can see a direct correlation, the more that I practice, the lighter I get. So, I'm an advocate of path and practice and participation.

Paul also offered a warning in regards to practices. This is seen in the following quote:

> I think that it's also important to be aware that we can be conditioned by the Dharma. We can be conditioned not only by the teachings, but also by practices…It's like there's a way that it doesn't get integrated into one's life. So I think there's danger on either side of that.

Steven (p#2) also talked about practices being essential. Like Paul, he similarly warned against practices becoming conditioned. His thoughts about the usefulness of practices for himself and the people he works with are illustrated in the following quote:

> I see the practices… as a very essential quality for inquiring into, helping a person inquire into emotions and beliefs and conditioning and helping basically decouple attention from those things. And decoupling in such a way as they're actually—they're gone, they're no longer arising as boulders or pebbles in their consciousness. So I think the practices are

> really important…I see it as all very very essential. And I continue to engage in my own life because I see by doing the Hatha yoga, the pranayama keeps me healthy, keeps the body really sensitive. I'm well aware that the mind builds expectations unconsciously, so to me part of the practice is taking a look at what are the expectations that have been built and recognizing them and at times running into them and having to stop and dissect them….That said, I ask people who work with me, at some point…to stop all their practices, to give them up. To stop meditating, stop doing yoga, stop doing the pranayama, stop doing Tai Chi, stop being a vegetarian. And then, see how it comes back. So to get out of the automaticity of the striving aspect and to realize *you're* not wanting to do this, *this* is wanting to do *you*. And so I did that myself. There was a time that I gave up all my practices and I just lay in bed…And then I saw how it started coming back, for me.

For Judith (p#3), she identified several practices that she does, but also highlighted that, for her, practices are not done in order to achieve NDC, but can serve to open the way for the experience of NDC to come independently. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> I do continue to do core breath—just finding these points along the subtle core of the body and doing these very very subtle breathwork within them and letting go of myself, my body and letting go of everything from there…And I do a meditation practice, not as fervently as when I was young. But I do it. Sometimes I do chanting. I love the feeling of going deeper and deeper inside. I still do that. And… just being a therapist, just sitting with people is a practice…Other than that, well, no… the experience of nondual consciousness I have had for a long time, so I'm not really concerned with doing things to achieve that… We can do brilliant things to open to it, and I think we should. I don't understand this dogma against techniques, I mean go ahead and do a technique because it's not that easy to realize it. The technique won't get in the way. It's not like you're stuck doing a technique. You do a technique for 15 minutes and then you just drop it. But that state [NDC], that just appears.

For Sophia (p#5), who identified Authentic Movement as her primary practice, the following quote illustrates how practices provide a sense of containment for her experience of NDC, which can be uncomfortable or overwhelming at times:

> I feel sometimes my boundaries are so diffuse, like they're so open, that sometimes I need certain things to…help me just feel the feeling of the

> container around myself because otherwise it begins to feel too much…Sometimes I'll go by myself for a walk. It's just like being alone with my own thoughts. Sometimes what I'll do…the thing that really works the best for me is to close my eyes, wherever I am , quietly, just move in a certain way and then I'm fine.

In the following quote, Laura (p#8) described how, in her experience, practices are a way of harmonizing physical energies:

> I wouldn't say I'm particularly disciplined, although how I tend to work is I just do an intake or it just hits me, oh, I need to do Qi Qong, or I need to do some yoga or I'll just feel off and I'll check in and think, oh this would be good. So, that's kind of how my practice works. I kind of follow my appetite and sometimes it's like, go sit, sometimes it's like go take a nap, which is literally like its own spiritual practice because sometimes it totally clears my energy or sometimes it's take a shower. It almost depends on what level the energies have entered, more on the surface or something deeper … Or if my body needs support or my spine…I'll do Hatha yoga. Or if just kind of need a real good saturation in quiet, I'll sit it meditation.

Laura went on clarify the purpose of the practices she currently uses, and like Sophia seemed to suggest that part of the outcome of her practices is that they contain and allow her to keep up with energy coming into her system. The following quote from Laura illustrates this:

> I wouldn't necessarily say these are practices for realization, but they're practices to maintain the human vehicle so that, for myself…when I have a lot of energetic input I can keep up with it—the input. Or allow it to move through so that more can come in. Not that I'm trying to get stuff to come in, it just seems to happen…I think mostly it's a preservation of the body-mind. Just like sort of a support.

Laura's comment about these practices not being for realization suggests that there are practices that are for realization of NDC. Because no follow-up question was asked, specific practices for realization were not identified.

Practices identified by participants: 28 different practices were identified by participants within their interviews and demographic questionnaires. The

following table shows all of the different practices identified and their distribution across participants. Questions were not asked to clarify the meaning or method of specific practices. For this reason, some practices listed here may in fact be subtypes of other practices, such as “resting in nonduality” or “mindfulness/Vipassana,” which may in fact be types of “meditation.” However, because these were mentioned on their own, they are listed here separately. Similarly, “meditation” is listed here as it was referred to by participants, however it is unclear whether or not this term refers to the same practice or not, as there are many different types of meditation.

Table 5

Practices That Support the Experience of Nondual Consciousness

Practice	*Percent of transcripts with practice*	*Participant #*
Meditation (no specified type)	87.5	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
Inquiry	50	1, 2, 4, 7
Work	37.5	1, 3, 5
Life	37.5	4, 7, 8
Resting in nonduality	25	1, 3
Chanting	25	3, 7
Prayer	25	7, 8
Mantra	25	4, 7
Hatha Yoga	25	2, 8
Dzogchen	12.5	1
Guru Yoga	12.5	1
Tonglen	12.5	1
Mindfulness/Vipassana	12.5	1

(continued)

Practice	*Percent of transcripts with practice*	*Participant #*
Sutra	12.5	2
Parenting	12.5	1
Nature	12.5	1
Core Breath	12.5	3
Physical letting go	12.5	3
Shamanism	12.5	6
Physical intake	12.5	8
Qi Qong	12.5	8
Yoga Nidra	12.5	2
Pranayama	12.5	2
Shower	12.5	8
Nap	12.5	8
Writing	12.5	5
Painting	12.5	5
Authentic Movement	12.5	5

Author's image.

Subcategory 5 of primary category 1: Impact of nondual consciousness on life.

The fifth subcategory identified within the first primary category was: "Impact of nondual consciousness on life." Coders identified this subcategory for all 8 participants. This subcategory is related to the overall impact of the experience of NDC in one's life in general, and to specific areas of one's life. Participants described myriad ways in which NDC has impacted their lives. Impacts mentioned by two or less participants were considered variant themes and

are not described here, although may be seen in narrative quotes. Impacts of NDC on participants' lives identified by five or more participants clustered into four themes: "More letting go and allowing," "More ease," "More trust," and "More clarity." Table 6 displays these four themes and their distribution across participants.

Table 6

Impact of Nondual Consciousness on Life

Theme #	*Impact*	*Percent of transcripts with theme*	*Participant #*
1	More letting go and allowing	87.5	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8
2	More ease	75	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8
3	More trust	62.5	2, 3, 4, 7, 8
4	More clarity	50	2, 5, 7, 8

Author's image.

Theme 1 of subcategory 5: More letting go and allowing.

Coders identified the theme "More letting go and allowing" for 7 participants in describing the impact NDC has had on their life. Several participants specifically talked about how their experience of NDC has affected their ability for letting go and allowing emotions. Paul (p#1) described this in the following way:

> Being able to allow them [emotions], I guess you could say, to tolerate or to bear the lightness and darkness of being, of emotional being…without having to react to whatever, just letting my emotions just wash over me…Yeah, I think there's been a direct affect.

Robert (p#4) also spoke about his experience of letting go and allowing emotions:

> It's [NDC] brought a greater sense of…a willingness to be with whatever arises, more or less, sometimes not fully, but increasingly so. So I just notice less and less reactivity. When it arises it's not as strong, it doesn't last as long… In terms of feelings, I would say that the range of my feelings has broadened and deepened. The openness to whatever they are as they arise just feels much greater. It used to be hard for me to be in touch with anger for instance, not that I get angry very often, but now it's like when I'm angry I know I'm angry and it's okay to be angry. And grief, it feels like it's allowed when it arises and there's a kind of poignant quality that comes with grieving. And the range, it feels like the range of love and joy and what we call more positive feelings has deepened and expanded as well. So it feels like there's a lot of space to feel whatever is going on.

Similarly, Ellen (p#7) offered this description about letting go and allowing emotions:

> There's no longer an intention to manipulate emotion. So there's no longer a ton of thinking or feeling, "I shouldn't feel what's here." If it's here, it's here. So that's the biggest difference... It isn't an excuse for being a creep or anything, but you know it's not used egoically in that way, like, "oh, it doesn't matter anyway so let me kick you." It's more that there just isn't a need to not be honest with myself about what's here, there's no sense of it shouldn't be this, it shouldn't be this.

Some participants talked about how their experience of NDC has affected their ability for letting go and allowing others to be as they are. In the following quote, Judith (p#3) described this impact in regards to her interpersonal experiences:

> I feel like I've gotten better and better at that. Not interfering. Not interrupting. Not functioning out of some kind of need of my own… There's more contact, there's more love and there's more ability to separate. For me, separation has been really important because I was always merged. So the ability to know that I can—not to get entangled, even to let things come up…there's definitely a deepening of contact, a deepening of allowing the other person to be as they are, a deepening of acceptance.

Theme 2 of subcategory 5: More ease.

Coders identified the theme "More ease" for 6 participants in describing the impact NDC has had on their life. This theme was illustrated by Ben (p#6) in the following quote:

> I think it's made things easier and lighter in general… things in general, relationships in general, moving though the world gets easier, it's not as heavy, it's not as conflicted.

A second example is offered by Paul (p#1) who stated the following:

> I have fewer problems… I have a lot less discord… So I think that that's the kind of, the most obvious, is that things just run smoother now.

And Steven (p#2) simply said that, "it makes everything much easier."

Theme 3 of subcategory 5: More trust.

Coders identified the theme "More trust" for 3 participants in describing how NDC has impacted their life. This theme is exemplified in the following examples. Judith (p#3) described how NDC has impacted her life in a positive way overall. More trust in her self and in life is one of the impacts she identified, among other variant themes:

> It has changed my life… like in every way…I'm a bit of a better person. More stable, more compassionate, more patient than I used to be… There's definitely more spontaneity, and more self-trust and more trust of life all together. That definitely has been my experience.

Robert (p#4) shared a similar sentiment, suggesting in this quote that, in general, NDC has affected everything in his life:

> It's affected everything, because it's about a relationship with life…Greater sense of gratitude and openness and acceptance, willingness to be with whatever arises, more or less, sometimes not fully, but increasingly so…I've noticed just this sense of more and more self trust, trusting in life more peaceful, more present-centered, open, grateful way

> of living. So, it's had that kind of subtle, but profound affect in all dimensions of my life.

For Ellen (p#7) the experience of more trust is synonymous with clarity. The following statement was coded for more trust:

> There's a felt sense of the trusting of whatever comes, you know, and that's what I mean by clarity, I don't mean I see everything so clearly necessarily, but just that there's a total trust in the movement of life without trying to second guess, "should this have happened?" "should I have said that?"…I completely trust the movement of life, period.

Theme 4 of subcategory 5: More clarity.

Coders identified the theme "More clarity" for 5 participants in describing the impact NDC has had on their life. Several participants described this theme in relation to how their capacity for making decisions has been impacted by NDC.

Steven (p#2) described it in the following way:

> So I find that there's a constant moving towards something and as I'm moving towards it there's a feeling and tone, "does this feel correct and harmonious?" And if it doesn't then there's a movement—I may still continue towards it, but there's a sensing going on of what's a more harmonious movement and then there might be something else that appears and the unharmonious thing drops away and I'm moving towards the harmonious…And I don't think much about it anymore.

Similarly, this theme was illustrated by Sophia (p#5) in her description of the impact of NDC on her having more clarity around relationships and decision making:

> I feel less and less inclined to have a lot of people in my life. Only to have the people I really want to be with in my life, not wanting to, as I call it, waste time. Like if something, even a book, if I'm not interested, I just give it back to the library. It's like things have to really feel quite right for me, being in this space. So also it has to do with relationships, all the time, you know, if it doesn't feel really quite right in the moment… It means that there are so many things that I wouldn't even be interested in doing at all that once I could have talked myself into... And really just knowing

> when things don't feel right…I think being in this kind of space often times, you get very picky in how you want to spend your time with other people. Because you don't really feel like leaving this space so much. So, yeah, I think there's a big impact.

Ellen (p#7) also referred to the impact of having more clarity around decision making:

> What we haven't spoken about is how decisions are made. It's just made by, there's a 'yes,' there's a 'no,' or there's an 'I don't know yet,' in which case I don't think about it, I just wait until it's clear. And that's quite different from how it used to be It's like, should I or shouldn't I, what are the advantages…a lot of mental energy for those decisions that it's not like that…If somebody asks me to teach some place or go some place, or this interview, or even taking somebody on as a client, there's just 'yes,' 'no.' …It's a very different way than thinking that you're in charge.

Laura (p#8) described her experience of clarity in this way:

> I'll see over the years how my mind is just so constructed around cause and effect…I mean just questioning all sorts of ways that I framed life or hold the way reality works, and it's been revolutionary to kind of open those things up and see if they're needed and I don't think I had the objectivity before to do that, or the clarity. I have traditionally not been a person of clarity. And that clarity has come in to a greater degree in the past decade. It was never a big strength of mine...But that's changed a lot. And I think it comes as a direct result of being more still. And not like I'm even trying to be more still, but there's just a natural tendency back towards stillness…Almost like if you were to stir up muck in a glass, but you just set it still for a while, it settles and there's clear water on the top, that feels like what has been happening over the past decade—clarity.

Subcategory 6 of primary category 1: Conditions enhancing or inhibiting to the experience of nondual consciousness.

The sixth subcategory identified within the first primary category was: "Conditions related to the experience of nondual consciousness." Coders identified themes within this subcategory for all 8 participants. Codes, representing specific conditions, within this subcategory were divided into two

themes: “Enhancing conditions,” and “Inhibiting conditions,” meaning conditions that enhance the experience of NDC and those that inhibit the experience of NDC. Because no leading or follow-up questions were asked in regards to this subcategory and its corresponding themes, only conditions that participants mentioned are presented here. In other words, just because a participant only mentioned certain conditions does not imply that there are not other conditions that they would agree are enhancing or inhibiting of their experience of NDC. The following table shows all of the different conditions identified by participants as enhancing or inhibiting of their experience of NDC and their distribution. Following this table some narrative quotes are presented reflecting comments made by participants in regards to conditions.

Table 7

Conditions Related to the Experience of Nondual Consciousness

Condition	*Percent of transcripts with condition*	*Participant #*
Enhancing Conditions:		
Quiet	50	1, 4, 5, 7
Nature	50	2, 3, 4, 5
In presence of someone who is open	50	2, 3, 4, 6
Practices	25	2, 3
Movement	25	2, 5
Practicing therapy	25	4, 5
(continued)		

Condition	*Percent of transcripts with condition*	*Participant #*
Enhancing Conditions:		
Teaching	25	4, 6
Basic needs met	25	5, 8
Morning	12.5	2
One-pointed activity	12.5	2
Inner posture	12.5	3
Connection with life	12.5	8
Being alone	12.5	5
Eyes closed	12.5	5

Condition	*Percent of transcripts with condition*	*Participant #*
Inhibiting Conditions:		
Divided attention	37.5	2, 4, 8
Conditioning	37.5	3, 4, 8
Talking	25	6, 7
Addictive behaviors	12.5	5
Rigidity	12.5	3
In presence of someone closed	12.5	4

Author’s image.

Several participants offered comments in regards to the ways in which conditions are enhancing or inhibiting of their experience of NDC. The following quotes represent some of these comments. Paul (p#1), for example, suggested that whether a condition is enhancing or inhibiting depends on the context. This is illustrated in the following quote.

> Researcher: Are there things that inhibit or things that really enhance or invite that state, that experience?
>
> Paul: Yeah. That's a good question. Yeah. But they differ, they differ. Sometimes like a very peaceful place. Very quiet. Very peaceful, can invite it. But then if you hang out in that place for some days, then the sound of a lawn mower or something is really helpful (snaps). Because you can get in this kind of sleepy—you know, a very crystal clear nondual and then it gets a little sleepy, it degrades a little, and then the lawn mower (snaps) clarity again. So normally you wouldn't say a lawn mower could be conducive, but in that case it was…An interruption can be conducive. So it really varies. I think any state can be conducive or not. That said, I think for practice, it's better to have a calmer space, at least in the beginning. Very, very, very, helpful. Because otherwise this mind is just this monkey mind in the beginning. Just jumps and jumps. So it's good to give it a space… just to calm the system down.

Robert (p#4) described something that several participants mentioned which is that, although there are conditions that inhibit or enhance his sense of openness to NDC, the overall sense of NDC does not disappear.

> Because this awareness is kind of… non-abiding, that is to say, it fluctuates…it depends on the context of what's happening and who I'm with. So if I'm just sitting quietly in nature, it may be more foreground. If I'm working on a project that requires thought and critical analysis, there's more thinking mind at work and this awareness is more in the background I would say. So, too…when I'm sitting with someone, like yourself, who's very open and sensitive then it's very easy to have the shared sense of this as well. So the openness is independent I would say and yet it cam be accentuated or amplified…It feels increasingly less conditional…But I would say that if I'm not busy with a task, if there's just kind of pauses, natural stops and gaps, just sitting, nothing that needs to be done, it's more foreground. When I'm in nature, it almost always comes more foreground. And when I'm sitting with someone who's sensitive and open it just whoosh—comes very quickly foreground. Or—this is interesting—when I'm in a teaching role. It's like when I'm asked to describe this, it's interesting, it's like it describes itself—it comes more foreground. So, if the circumstances are calling for it.

Laura (p#8) also spoke of conditions as inhibiting or enhancing of her experience of openness to NDC. She made these comments:

> I would say probably what makes me feel less open is…just probably some limitation in some perception I'm having. You know where I'm unable to see things from a different perspective, like I don't have all the information so I make a conclusion out of the only pieces that I have or…Probably what makes me less open is when I make a judgment based on the information I have that may not be complete and so for me probably some kind of judgment would be the most common thing that would prevent a sense of openness….In general, any kind of typical sort of factors that would eliminate your average human being's stress would allow for more openness. I mean I'm just talking about basic stuff, like having shelter, food, and even more so—like an environment that I could rest….What makes me more closed, I guess this is changing, like I'm kind of at this juncture where this is starting to change. But if I'm being very much judged it's difficult for me to remain open with somebody. I'm starting to kind of get that one, like where I can be judged quite a bit and still remain open. And what else has made me more closed—probably just sheer volume of having, feeling like my energy is being called upon in lots of different areas.

Summary of primary category 1: Presence of nondual consciousness in one's life.

In summary, primary category 1 relates to participants' thoughts and discussion *about* NDC and its presence in their life. In contrast, primary category 2, presented in the next section, reflects participant's descriptions of their directly felt experience of NDC as they were speaking *from* it. Themes in primary category 1 were divided into six subcategories representing various aspects of how NDC has been present in each participant's life. Some of these subcategories related to participant's overall thoughts about NDC, while other subcategories related to the narrative stories of how NDC has been present in each participant's life over time and currently. A discussion of these the possible meaning of these subcategories, their corresponding themes, and the possible relationships between themes will be presented in the following chapter.

Subcategories included the terminology participants used to refer to and describe NDC, participant's personal ideas regarding the nature of NDC, the presence of NDC in each participant's life as a process over time, supports for the experience of NDC, the impact of NDC on one's life, and finally, enhancing and inhibiting conditions related to the experience of NDC.

The first subcategory presented in this section, related to terminology, reflects the multiple ways in which participants describe their experience of NDC, including verbal and nonverbal gestures, and the various terms they use to refer to their experience. The multiplicity of terms used by participants to describe NDC was presented in Table 2: terms used to describe experience of nondual consciousness. This subcategory also relates to participant's thoughts about the relationship between words and the experience of NDC, including the impact of words, the utility of words, and the overall ineffability of the experience of NDC.

The second subcategory presented in this section related to participant's personal ideas regarding the nature of NDC. This subcategory included the various thoughts that participants shared, such as the thought that NDC is often confused conceptually, that people have natural capacities for NDC, that NDC is available to all, and that NDC is rare. Additional thoughts were that people do not really want NDC just its qualities, and that the body has been overlooked in discussions of NDC. Finally several participants shared thoughts regarding their own actual experience of NDC as being different from ideas they have held about NDC. A summary of participant' ideas and beliefs regarding NDC was presented in Table 2: participants' ideas or beliefs regarding nondual consciousness.

The third subcategory presented in this section related to participant's descriptions of NDC as a process over time. Five themes were presented in this subcategory each representing a uniquely experienced stage or distinct experience within participant's process of NDC over time. These themes included participant's early experiences of NDC, a stage of seeking NDC, the experience of NDC although a sense of separate self remains, feelings of doubt or uncertainty regarding the experience of NDC, and stabilization of NDC in one's experience. A summary of these themes was presented in Table 3: Subcategory 3: nondual consciousness as a process over time. The relationship between these themes and their possible meaning will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Subcategories 4, 5, and 6 in this section referred to various factors related to the presence of NDC in one's life. These included supports for the experience of NDC, the impact of NDC on one's life, and conditions related to the experience of NDC. Subcategory 4, related to supports for NDC, included external guidance in the form of teachers and teachings regarding NDC, as well as practices which participants utilize in regards to their experience of NDC. A summary of the support of external guidance was presented in Table 4: types of external guidance supporting the experience of nondual consciousness. A summary of the practices utilized by participants as a support was presented in Table 5: practices that support the experience of nondual consciousness. Subcategory 5, related to the impact of NDC on one's life, included more letting go, more ease, more trust and more clarity. A summary of these impacts was presented in Table 6: impact of nondual consciousness on life.

Finally, subcategory 6 referred to conditions related to the experience of NDC including both enhancing and inhibiting conditions for NDC. A summary of these conditions was presented in Table 7: conditions related to the experience of nondual consciousness. The relationship between subcategories and corresponding themes presented here, as well as their relationship to primary category 2 will be presented in the following chapter. A presentation of primary category 2 is now presented.

Primary category 2: Directly felt experience of nondual consciousness itself.

The second primary category is: "Directly felt experience of nondual consciousness itself." Primary category 2 refers to the description of the experience of nondual consciousness (NDC) in and of itself. In contrast to primary category 1, which focused on participants' reflections on their experience of NDC in their lives in general, this category represents participants' descriptions of NDC in the moment, including descriptions of NDC in the presence of another person, including this researcher. Themes within this category are related to participants' descriptions of their experience of NDC during the interview itself, in real time. A brief discussion regarding the method by which coders determined when participants were describing their directly felt experience versus offering their thoughts *about* NDC is presented. Themes within this category were divided into two subcategories: "Essential qualities of the felt experience of nondual consciousness" and "Felt sense of nondual consciousness." Each of these subcategories and their corresponding themes are presented. A discussion about

the interrelationship between these subcategories and possible meaning will be presented in the following chapter.

Method for coding directly felt experience of nondual consciousness.

Coders determined when participants were describing their directly felt experience as it was occurring by identifying process indicators for the experience of NDC. “Process indicators” refers to specific markers identified by the coding team in interview transcripts where it was determined that participants were directly experiencing and speaking *from* their experience of NDC versus speaking *about* their experience. Several process indicators were identified including changes in participants’ behavior during the interview, changes in the content of their descriptions of their experience, and mutually felt changes in the interpersonal field experienced by this researcher or the coding team. Data for the primary category “directly felt experience of NDC” was coded as such when two or more process indicators occurring simultaneously were identified.

Changes in participants’ behavior during the interview included changes in speech volume, rate, and rhythm; participants closing their eyes; and changes in breathing patterns. Additionally, several participants illustrated changes in their ease with words during the interview, showing greater difficulty finding words and less articulation while they were experiencing NDC directly as compared to other parts of the interview.

Changes in the content of participants’ description of their experience included more detailed focus and description of the experience of NDC itself in

present time versus speaking about the experience in the past tense or in the second person. Further related to content, more than half of participants subjectively identified the experience of NDC, directly stating that they were in the experience and speaking from it in the moment.

Finally, mutually felt changes in the interpersonal field experienced by this researcher or the coding team was another process indicator. This indicator was subjectively identified by directly felt changes in consciousness experienced by this researcher during different moments of the interviews, and by the coding team during the process of reviewing the data.

Subcategory 1 of primary category 2: Essential qualities of the felt experience of nondual consciousness.

Coders identified themes within the subcategory "Essential qualities of the felt experience of nondual consciousness" for all 8 participants. This subcategory refers specifically to qualities of NDC found across a majority of participants in their directly felt experience of NDC. Six major themes representing the essential qualities of the felt experience of NDC were identified: "Ineffable," "Energy," "Positively experienced," Nonlocalized," "Dynamic," and "Verticality." A table illustrating these themes and their distribution across participants is presented followed by a description of each theme with supporting narrative quotes.

Table 8

Essential Qualities of the Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness

Theme #	*Essential Quality*	*Percent of transcripts with theme*	*Participant #*
1	Ineffable	100	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2	Energy	100	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
3	Positively Experienced	87.5	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
4	Nonlocalized	87.5	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
5	Dynamic	75	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
6	Verticality	75	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Author's image.

Theme 1 of subcategory 1: Ineffable.

Coders identified the theme "Ineffable" for all 8 participants in their descriptions of the physically felt experience of NDC. This theme refers to the essential quality of NDC as being an experience that cannot be described in words. The following narrative examples illustrate the ways this theme was expressed. Several participants expressed this theme while also illustrating that, although the experience of NDC is ineffable, it is nonetheless unmistakable. This quote by Paul (p#1) is an example of this:

> It's absolutely unmistakable, even as you completely could never say what it is.

Steven (p#2) offered a similar comment:

> There's no way to describe it (laughs)… even though it feels tangible, I can't define it.

For several participants, this theme was illustrated in the apparent difficulty of finding words to describe their experience of NDC during the interview itself. One example is seen in the following quote by Robert (p#4), where he also mentioned the quality of NDC being nonlocalized:

> I think that is maybe another way to talk about it. That—(Pause) These words are difficult. That we really are not solid, being is not solid and it's not localized…So, this is where it gets very subtle because, even in using words, these subtle concepts of space or transparency, there's a slight reification, there's a naming and objectification of something that's actually not objective…Words can't describe what it is, it's so beyond words.

Ellen (p#7) expressed the ineffability of NDC in the following quote:

> True nondual awareness has no subject and no object, is indefinable, unknowable, indescribable, un-thought, cannot be made into an object… there's no mind that can enter there so there's nothing we could say about it. I mean that's why traditions will speak of it as unnamable, indefinable, any word you could use would not be it, not that any word you use is the thing anyway… It's palpable. How can you describe it, I don't know.

Theme 2 of subcategory 1: Energy.

Coders identified the theme "Energy" for all 8 participants in their descriptions of the physically felt experience of NDC. This theme refers to the energetic quality participants described in their direct physical experience of NDC. Expressions of this theme included descriptions of physical vibration, aliveness, and electricity. The following narrative examples illustrate the ways in which participants expressed this theme.

Steven (p#2) describes energy in this way:

> It's just a kind of felt hum. But I don't hear it as a sound. I feel the vibration of it.

Judith (p#3) described energy by also pointing to the significance in her felt experience of what she chooses to attend to. The following statement illustrates this:

> I can feel, depending on what I want to attend to in my experience—you know, there's energy…There's a buzzing kind of vibration in the air…So, there's that, there's a movement in the air.

Sophia (p#5) illustrated this theme in the following way, emphasizing the way in which energy is not a subtle experience, but extremely palpable:

> It's energetic. You feel it in your body. There's like a huge energy that you feel in your body. There's like a huge energy that starts happening (laughs). I don't know what the word is. It's like a force that starts to happen.

Ben (p#6) described this theme along with describing the dynamic quality of the energy itself:

> I can almost feel a ringing in my hands, like a real electricity in my skin, swirling, moving energy… Really it feels like at the subtlest level there's an energy coming into being within me and comes out and manifests.

For Ellen (p#7), energy is felt as a sense of aliveness:

> There is a certain sense of aliveness in the body… There's a sense of, I say tingling, it's not exactly that, but there's a sense of cells that are moving and vibrating in the body. So it feels like there's that sense of aliveness.

Theme 3 of subcategory 1: Positively experienced.

Coders identified the theme "Positively experienced" for 7 participants in their descriptions of the physically felt experience of NDC. This theme refers to the essential quality of NDC as being something that participants experience positively, illustrated by a sense of well-being, delight, and peacefulness. The following narrative examples illustrate the ways in which participants expressed

this theme. In the following quote, Paul (p#1) illustrated this theme as he described his felt experience of NDC as something light.

> Researcher: So maybe you can say something about what the felt sense is for you.
>
> (pause)
>
> Paul: Light. Kind of light, in both senses. Luminous, but also feathery. Light touch. And *de*light. (pause) Definitely kind of calmness. Peacefulness.

Steven (p#2) illustrated this quality of well-being as something that ebbs and flows as his experience of NDC ebbs and flows:

> There's a real deep resting in a sense of well-being and then back into life and the torrent of moment to moment phone calls and whatever. But in amidst those phone calls or as we're sitting here there's always this constant kind of flooding in—it's like an ebb floods in and becomes predominant for a moment and then it ebbs out—of a quality of well-being…I can feel its resonance in my body, the quality of equanimity or well-being.

Robert (p#4) illustrated this theme in the following quote where he also commented on the subtlety of the experience.

> There's a quality of joy also that's…rather quiet and subtle. It's like a quiet joy of being I would say as well. A deep contentment. Peacefulness.

Theme 4 of subcategory 1: Nonlocalized.

Coders identified the theme "Nonlocalized" for 7 participants in their descriptions of the physically felt experience of NDC. This theme refers to the essential quality of NDC as being something that cannot be specifically located in one's experience, essentially experienced outside of the construct of space. This theme is further illustrated by descriptions of participants' sense of diffuse and

fluid boundaries, and lack of locatable "center." The following narrative examples illustrate the ways in which participants expressed this theme.

Robert (p#4) described this quality of NDC being nonlocalized in the following way:

> It is a felt sense, referring to some subjective sense that—that the apparent perceiver, the apparent subject, in this case myself, is open spacious awareness, so the sense itself is actually lightly localized or even nonlocalized in terms of this particular body-mind…it's a feeling of unlimited space, space without a center, space without a periphery or boundary so I can't—and I'm speaking from it right now—it's like I cannot say where I stop and you begin… a feeling of being very much here, not elsewhere, but I couldn't tell you where here is. It's not a here that's—it's not a localized here. It's a here wherever one is in other words.

In the following quote, Ben (p#6) illustrated the quality of NDC being nonlocalized. For Ben, this is also an example of how this is positively experienced

> The center is just a little bit off—it's hard to find the center. (Pause)…it feels like my consciousness is going out sideways…Spacious, open, moving, almost like I'm a field, not necessarily defined by my body, but it's more like a moving field. There is a feeling that I sometimes get that, it's happening now, it's just an association, it feels like I'm leaving my body, like the space in my body between my head and my chest and my feet, the reference—the kind of spatial reference points that I have gets elongated to hundreds of thousands of miles. So that the space between my head and my feet is immense…It's really soothing and wonderful.

In response to a question regarding her direct experience Laura (p#8) offered this statement, illustrating both the quality of NDC being nonlocalized as well as the experience of trying to put words to her experience:

> It's non locatable or definable…You know it's kind of like—I don't always like to touch it in that way. It's not that I don't want to touch it, but just like, like to reduce things to words, you know?

Theme 5 of subcategory 1: Dynamic.

Coders identified the theme "Dynamic" for 6 participants in their descriptions of the physically felt experience of NDC. "Dynamic" refers to participants' use of dynamic verbs, implying movement or change, in their descriptions of their direct physical experience of NDC. The following narrative examples illustrate the ways in which participants expressed this theme:

Steven (p#2) described his experience of NDC, or "mystery," having a dynamic quality of ebb and flow. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> It's like the background flavor of the mystery really floods more than any of the foreground…there's always this constant kind of flooding in—it's like an ebb floods in and becomes predominant for a moment and then it ebbs out…Sometimes that moves foreground very strongly and sometimes it's just very politely present.

For Sophia (p#5), the dynamic quality of NDC is experienced as a very strong pull:

> It's very downward feeling. It's a very phhoooo strong pull towards the ground feeling.

Another example of this theme was offered by Ellen (p#7) who described her physical experience of NDC as something which is alive:

> There's a live spirit here, it's moving through you, through me, you know. It's palpable. How can you describe it, I don't know. I wouldn't know how to put words to it. But there's a vividness and an energetic feel and sense of just being alive in the moment, do you know. Being here…In this that's awake, it's alive. It's living, moving, breathing, it's not something static.

Theme 6 of subcategory 1: Verticality.

Coders identified the theme "Verticality" for 6 participants in their descriptions of their physically felt experience of NDC. "Verticality" refers to the

ways in which participants' direct physical experience of NDC included a quality of verticality, expressed by descriptions of vertical movement, and vertical alignment, felt primarily in the body. The following narrative examples illustrate the ways in which participants expressed this theme.

Judith (p#3) suggested that it is the energy itself that has a quality of verticality. In the following statement she also pointed out that verticality is specifically related to movement in the spine:

> There's energy going up the spine.

Robert (p#4) also illustrated the way in which verticality is a description of the movement of some kind of life current, or energy, that he feels:

> There's a sense of a life current…a very kind of essential lively current…and that actually has a feeling of verticality to it—kind of an uprightness—and I feel it along the central channel in the body…it has a vibration of liveliness, kind of essential vibrancy as well.

Several participants described their experience of NDC as being from the head down. The following quote from Sophia (p#5) illustrates this in connection with her sense of verticality:

> It's a downward, very strong downward pull… I think the shift for me goes from the head, and…if I allow it to not get cut off from the neck, then you feel the whole thing falling down.

Another example of this is offered by Ben (p#6) in his description of verticality:

> The energy, the feeling is that I drop away from my head into my body. I drop down.

Ellen (p#7) described her experience of verticality which includes a sense of stillness and silence:

> There's a sense of verticality (takes hand and moves it down chest) that just sort of seems to reside…For me it feels like it's a vertical sense of—of stillness and silence that, that is pretty much present if I tune in. I mean it's not that there's something trying to always make sure it's there. It's just that it feels like it's a subtle, ever present experience of something vertical and, and very quiet.

Subcategory 2 of primary category 2: Felt sense of nondual consciousness.

Coders identified themes within the subcategory "Felt sense of nondual consciousness" for all 8 participants. This subcategory refers to the specific qualities of the felt sense of NDC expressed by participants. As described by Gendlin (1962), felt sense refers to the inner concrete flow of "something present, directly referred to, and felt" (p. 243). It is that "inner sense," which can be located when attention is directed inwardly, which is at once so simple and universally experienced that it is not easily pointed to (Gendlin, 1962, p. 12).

Seven major themes were identified within this subcategory. These were: "Felt sense of Mutuality," "Felt sense of Truth," "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement," "Felt sense of Openness," "Felt sense of Form and Formlessness," "Felt sense of No Division," and "Felt sense of Me-ness." Each of these themes will be discussed in the next section along with a table illustrating their distribution among participants. Following this, composite quotes will be presented for each participant identifying each of the themes they expressed. Rather than presenting quotes for each separate theme, quotes will be presented for each participant separately in an effort to retain the essence of each

participant's directly felt experience of NDC as it was being expressed during each interview.

Seven major themes regarding the felt sense of nondual consciousness.

The first theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of Mutuality." This theme refers specifically to participants' description of their experience of NDC in the presence of another person. Mutuality refers to participants' descriptions of a felt sense of an interpersonal energetic field, resonance, and intimacy. This theme was coded for all 8 participants.

The second theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of Truth." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of a felt sense of what is felt to be true, often experienced as a sense of obviousness, rightness, knowing, and alignment. This theme was coded for all 8 participants.

The third theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of an interiorly felt sense of a bigger movement underlying their experience. This movement was described as being out of one's personal control, spontaneous, and inherently intelligent. This theme was coded for 6 participants.

The fourth theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of No Division." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of a felt sense of no division or separation, also described as a sense of oneness. This theme was coded for 6 participants.

The fifth theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of Form and Formlessness." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of an interiorly felt sense of interchanging form and formlessness, also described in terms of emptiness and fullness. This theme was coded for 5 participants.

The sixth theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of Openness." This theme refers to participants' descriptions of an interiorly felt sense of openness, also referred to by descriptions of opening, and spaciousness. This theme was coded for 4 participants.

The seventh theme regarding the felt sense of NDC was a "Felt sense of Me-ness." This theme refers to the felt sense of a distinct "Me" or personality distinct from others that participants described, despite the overall sense and knowledge that no definable "Me" or self exists. This theme was coded for 4 participants.

Table 9

The Felt Sense of Nondual Consciousness

Theme #	*Felt sense of:*	*Percent of transcripts with theme*	*Participant #*
1	Mutuality	100	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2	Truth	87.5	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
3	A Bigger Underlying Movement	87.5	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
4	No Division	75	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
5	Form and Formlessness	50	1, 2, 3, 4
6	Openness	50	3, 4, 5, 6
7	"Me-Ness"	50	2, 6, 7, 8

Author's image.

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #1: Paul.

Paul expressed his felt sense of mutuality in the following quote, where he described his sense of an intersubjective field within which he is not always sure if what he feels is arising from him or the other person:

> Particularly in a shared space, in an intersubjective space, there's all kinds of things arising in the field and it's not always clear to me what I'm noticing. Am I noticing it in the other person, or is it a projection arising from me? So, in terms of the nondual, I let it float… we could say the felt sense, the field, the intersubjective field, dimensionality of it. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

In the following quote, Paul expressed his felt sense of truth in describing his experience of NDC as unmistakable and including a quality of clarity.

> There's an embodied presence to it. It's absolutely unmistakable, even as you completely could never say what it is. But it does have these qualities of…clarity, very unconfused. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

Paul described his experience of NDC including a felt sense of form and formlessness in the following quote. For Paul, formlessness is experienced as a sense of openness or emptiness, and form is experienced in the sparks of formulations that arise within the emptiness. Paul also offered a warning in the following quote regarding the potential for getting stuck in either the form or formless state.

> There'll be times that I'll…find myself open and just rest in that openness…There's the openness, but then also there's the responsivity that comes out of the openness, the spark, the sparkliness, the liveliness…And so the danger is reifying the sparkliness or getting stuck in the emptiness…so the sparks that come up… to see the emptiness inside the forms. And in the emptiness to see that forms arise, including formulations. But that there's nothing substantial, you don't need to get worked up about it. (theme #5 Felt sense of Form and Formlessness)

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #2: Steven.

For Steven, the felt sense of mutuality is experienced as a deep intimacy. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> All your questions come back to this one flavor that interconnects everything and to me makes everything such an intimate, intimate experience. In living that intimacy then whenever I'm with a situation or with someone…there's just always a desire to enter into that deep intimacy. So it feels like a moment of…sacred marriage, where there's just a very sacred intimacy, and I love it when another person can enter there and not be scared of it and really just let go into the full flavor of it. Then the richness and the beauty… it's just a moment of sacred intimacy. Deliciousness…It eliminates an element of self-consciousness and fear that just opens up the desire for deeper and deeper intimacy. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

Steven expressed the felt sense of no division in the following quote in describing the overall "sameness" of all things.

> If I sit with a person or I sit with an object, after a while, for me, it feels like I'm not looking at the object, the object is as much looking at me as I'm looking at it and something is coming towards me as something is going towards it. And that flavor of unisity overcomes the difference of the objects, even though there's a quality of special-ness to each object. That to me is its flavor and its distinctiveness. And yet there's something to me that ties it together and just feels like an underlying neutral-ness. Sameness. (theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

For Steven, the felt sense of truth was expressed in a feeling of rightness. This is seen in the following statement:

> I don't know why I'm doing what I'm doing, all I know is it feels right. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

Connected to this sense of rightness or truth is Steven's felt sense of a bigger underlying movement with its own inherent wisdom. Steven described his felt sense of this and the impact on his ability to make choices, in the following quote:

> I didn't create it. I have no control over it… I would say it feels like it has its own kind of magic it does and I'm just seeing more and more its permeation of everything…there's just a flow of spontaneity and I feel so totally radically not in control…The whole movement though is contained in a larger field I would say, that feels like it's holding the whole thing…I'm attuned to a differentiating between…what feels intuitively harmonious and what feels out of sorts and unharmonious in the moment. So I find that there's a constant moving towards something and as I'm moving towards it there's a feeling and tone, "does this feel correct and harmonious?" And if it doesn't then there's a movement—I may still continue towards it, but there's a sensing going on of what's a more harmonious movement and then there might be something else that appears and the unharmonious thing drops away and I'm moving towards the harmonious… I'm just, I would say, a body-mind following its marching orders and seeing where it goes off and righting itself and moving moment to moment. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

Steven expressed his felt sense of form and formlessness in the following quote where he described his experience of forms being both of substance and transparent. He described this as something he experiences as if via a "seventh sense."

> It feels like there's a seventh sense. So my eyes are perceiving separation, they see boundaries around you, the difference between your hair and the space and the lamp and the couch and your hand and the fingers and the couch. So all those definitions are there. There's a quality or flavor of you and your particular personality. The ears hear a stillness and the sound of my own body. But…something else is always present. It's…something that deeply saturates everything. So, even as I'm looking at you, there's a feeling of the insubstantiality of your body. If I'm looking at the glass or the table there's something that registers the figure, but there's something else that registers a transparency in the form itself... It just pervades everywhere, like a thickness. Viscosity. (theme #5 "Felt sense of Form and Formlessness")

Steven reflected on his felt sense of "Me-ness," or distinct personality, in the following quote.

> I'm aware that…at times there's a constitution of a kind of personality that has preferences… I don't like beets. I'll give you my beets if we're in a restaurant. I don't want a hot pepper. Give me some olives. You know, the

> personality is still there, that likes things. That doesn't like things. (theme #7 "Felt sense of Me-ness")

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #3: Judith.

Judith described her felt sense of form and formlessness in the following way.

> I've described it as a kind of mutual transparency, but that's what it is. It's like everything is made of empty space at the same time as it's made of whatever it's made of. So everything is completely without weight or substance at the same time as it's made of substance…I experience my body as being made of empty space, and it's not like… I'm not here, I'm here you know, but I'm not experiencing my body as substantial. And, at the same time, it's really hard to put into words, at the same time…there's wide open pervasive spaciousness. So, if I take my hand now, it's completely dissolved made of empty space and at the same time I can experience the couch that way, you know, all through the room and so forth. (theme #5 "Felt sense of Form and Formlessness")

Judith expressed her felt sense of a bigger underlying movement in the following statement in which she described her experience of NDC as self-arising and not in her personal control.

> It is self-arising, to use the Buddhist expression. It is there, it's not something that you have to, or can create. You can attune to it and then drop the attunement. But it's just there. That's an amazing thing about it. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

Judith also described her felt sense of openness in her experience of all pervasive space. This was expressed in the following quote:

> There's a kind of a luminous spaciousness… Something actually pervading the walls, pervading my body, it's like being held in this field that pervades everything. Kind of a stillness inside all the movement. You know, my head kind of feels like it's made of space…and the wall feels like it's made of space, even though it's cement…And it sounds weird. I mean, you're made of empty space. It's not like something I could tell a lot of people… It's clear through. Clear through space. But it's very, very, very subtle space. You can feel it and you can also see it. I can see it. Which is a weird thing because of course I can't see through the wall, but I can see the porousness of the wall. (theme #4 "Felt sense of Openness")

Judith illustrated her felt sense of mutuality in the following quote where she described the experience of spontaneous exchange and resonance that occurs with others who are open.

> The contact is amazing when two people are open in the same way. I mean if someone is open in their heart and I'm open in my heart, then there's like a spontaneous exchange, a feeling of contact between us. The same with the whole body... There's actual resonance from the inside of one body to the inside of another body. That's a very interesting thing that the inside of our body—if we live in our body, so to be open in the body, the internal space of the body connects with the internal space of other bodies. So there's this actual kind of igniting kind of contact. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

In expressing the felt sense of no division Judith described the powerful impact that this sense of oneness has had on her life:

> It has changed my life. It's changed my life in a lot of ways, like in every way. You know…just being able to walk around the world and feel comfortable, I wasn't able to do that. And now I have no problem with that, that has really changed completely and I think that's from both just this sense of embodiment and the sense of oneness with everything around me. (theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #4: Robert.

Robert described his felt sense of mutuality in the following quote where he highlighted the sense of a field that is amplified when it is shared.

> So there's a feeling of meeting here in this dialogue, and of course you're interviewing me, but I'm always curious what your experience is and whether there's a felt sense of it being shared as we speak because it's a shared field as well. It's not…localized so it has a kind of contagious quality…There's a resonance that's there. Yeah, it's like amplified…I think presence is amplified when there's a shared field and yet it's also autonomous, it feels like it's not dependent on that as well. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

Several participants described their felt sense of truth as something that they could feel a sense of alignment with. This is seen in the following statement by Robert:

> [There's] a feeling of alignment with essence or truth. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

As with other participants, Robert described his felt sense of an underlying movement as something that is impersonal with its own intelligence.

> So it feels like an impersonal movement actually...It's interesting. Totally un-meditated, un-premeditated, and very spontaneous and surprising. So, it's almost like a sense of being used as an instrument…It unfolds of its own, has its own intelligence and timetable. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

In the following quote, also coded earlier in regards to the quality of NDC being nonlocalized, Robert illustrated his felt sense of openness, described as space. This quote also reflects Robert's felt sense of no division in the way he described space permeating everything.

> So, why space? Well, it's a feeling of unlimited space, space without a center, space without a periphery or boundary so I can't—and I'm speaking from it right now—it's like I cannot say where I stop and you begin. I mean there's clearly an awareness of a differentiated body-mind and so on, but on an essential level, there's a felt sense of transparency, and I think that is maybe another way to talk about it. That—(Pause) These words are difficult. That we really are not solid, being is not solid and it's not localized, that it permeates everything, *is* everything, we could say it's immanent, transcendent and immanent. So everything is saturated with space. I would say that is the felt sense of it. So you are space and I am space and all of this is space. And it has a quality of openness, again referring to no limit or boundary or definition. (theme #4 "Felt sense of Openness" and theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

In this quote, Robert described his felt sense, experienced in the body, of form and formlessness:

> It's in the body and then I could describe also (pause) a feeling of ground or groundedness, but again…it's a spacious groundedness…there's a sense of being grounded in reality in fact that is prior to the coming and

> going of these particular circumstances or forms...But, strangely a kind of groundless ground, or a non- localized ground—both solid and spacious simultaneously. (theme #5 "Felt sense of Form and Formlessness")

Robert stated his felt sense of no division in the following quote:

> So the perceived and the perceiver are essentially not different—undivided I would say. (theme #6 "Felt sense of No division")

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #5: Sophia.

Sophia described her felt sense of mutuality in the following quote where she also pointed out that this is an experience with both positive and negative consequences for her:

> What it does for me is that, to be in this space means that I can deeply—really feel like deeply connected to other people who are in this space, who wouldn't even call it this. They wouldn't even know what we were talking about. And then it feels so wonderful because you're in that space with another person. That's the positive. The negative is that I feel sometimes that…other people want to invite themselves into this space, and then they—it's like it pulls you out of it in that way. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

Sophia illustrated her felt sense of truth, pointing out its quality of authenticity:

> I think it's more like a feeling of authenticity…the moment where a person goes into what is their truth in that moment versus this other thing where…people live a lot of the time in…two separate spaces, what's out there and in there, and I think there are moments where there is no separation, and that's in their moment where they know it's really true. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

Sophia went on to describe the felt sense of truth for her as something that is experienced as "absolute truth." In the following quote, she suggested the importance of humor and not attaching to the felt sense of truth as something which is absolute, but rather changing in every moment.

> When you feel something it actually feels like the absolute truth… And you have to keep a sense of humor…You have to realize it's not such an omnipotent absolute truth space. Like just like your body wants to do a certain movement in a certain moment, ten minutes later it's going to find that another movement is perfectly right….And they're all true. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

In the following quote, Sophia illustrated her felt sense of no division in describing the dissolution of the felt boundary between her self and what is outside the self.

> What my experience is, and it's very hard to actually put in words, are the different moments in which you don't—It's like almost like you no longer feel that there's a boundary between yourself and the other part that—the self and the part that's outside the self—there is no longer—you can't even use those words any more. That, that boundary has melted, softened, dissolved in a way. (theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

Sophia referred to her felt sense of a bigger underlying movement in the next quote. As with other participants, she suggested that this movement is out of one's personal control, although there may be a feeling of choice.

> Are you going to choose to move or are you going to choose to wait to be moved…Do we ever choose to move? I mean I think the question is, what does it mean to choose? I mean who's making the choice, right? Who's choosing? Who's really choosing?...I think that something about nonduality has to do with an opening to something that's bigger than you are. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

During the interview itself, Sophia expressed a felt sense of openness which she experienced and described as an opening. This is seen in the following quote:

> I felt…a shift where something inside me was like just wanting to go with the pure movement and not with the pre-established movement, which feels like some kind of opening. It feels like an opening and it feels like a letting go of something that has to do with how it's supposed to be or the rules or what's right or not right…It's something, I can't even explain it, but it's more like being in your bones versus being in the muscle level, is the way I describe it, which may not make any sense at all, but that's a part of what's happened…I have a feeling that something is opening. (theme #4 "Felt sense of Openness")

In describing her experience of NDC in the presence of another person, Sophia expressed her felt sense of mutuality and no division, described as a feeling of no separation between herself and the other person.

> In a much bigger way, less simple or bigger, there is a kind of sense you have on a physical level that something—like the walls have moved at that moment. Like all the walls have moved and there aren't anymore walls. There isn't you sitting there, they're sitting there, that in that moment you're the same person sitting there (points to space between the researcher and herself)…But there's no feeling of separation in that moment, of what their experience is, of what your experience is, there's no feeling of that. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality;" theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #6: Ben.

For Ben, his felt sense of mutuality, hallmarked by a feeling of energy and merging, is a powerful experience, as described in the following quote.

> But the somatic component, the feeling of energy, the feeling of swirling gets more intense when I'm with people. Yeah, when I'm with people the center kind of falls away, it's almost like a wind being in a room, I can just feel that wind around me…The most intense experience I've had with this, with the nondual, is in staring at someone. The feeling of energy was so intense and there was a real merging. It was like all the boundaries of my self are gone. (Pause)…I notice this with clients. I can feel their field, and they'll hit upon something and, and it feels deeper, authentic, whatever. I can feel them open up—a shift in experience. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

And then in direct response to sitting with this researcher, Ben commented on the sense of mutuality describing the experience of resonance:

> There's nondual. Wow. (Pause)…There's kind of like a total lining up…there's kind of…like a resonance. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

Ben expressed his felt sense of truth, which he also connected to a feeling of silence, illustrated in the following statement:

> And it's been a feeling of silence or truth. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

Ben expressed his felt sense of a bigger underlying movement in the way he described a feeling of energy coming into him and manifesting. As with other participants, Ben described this movement as a creative force, out of his personal control. There is a relief for Ben in experiencing this movement as being out of his control as is seen in this quote.

> It feels like at the subtlest level there's an energy coming into being within me and comes out and manifests…It moves and it creates and expresses and then it keeps going (Pause). There's a certain point where you kind of—surf it, and there's a freedom in letting go and riding that energy…and that's pretty cool, there's a lot in there. (Pause) There's almost a relief that it's not all mine…In a way, it does it on its own, it's just sinking into it, dropping into it. (theme #3 "A Bigger Underlying Movement")

Ben expressed his felt sense of openness in the following way:

> This buzzing in my body, this feeling of openness, that's another thing that characterizes this state of consciousness. It's almost like I can control—like I can open myself, this cracking open or being open…When I go in I can also feel an opening. I can feel myself open and drop in. (theme #4 "Felt sense of Openness")

Ben referred to his felt sense of no division in the following quote where he described the experience as being on the edge of something.

> There's another feeling too, it's a—it's like I'm on the edge of a—I don't know, a knife or something like that. It's realizing that this energy is actually both me and everything—not me. (theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

Ben described his felt sense of "Me-ness" in the following way, where he suggested that, although he feels a sense of "me," its boundaries are undefined, with no definite boundaries.

> There is a feeling of "me-ness," but it's definitely—like a cloud, the definite boundaries of my skin aren't there anymore. (theme #7 "Felt sense of Me-ness")

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #7: Ellen.

For Ellen, the felt sense of mutuality described in the following quote includes an experience of mutual recognition and reflection. As seen with other participants, this experience includes a sense of no division between one's self and others. In her description, Ellen also pointed to the way in which there is no observer of this experience, just the experience in and of itself.

> This isn't specific to sitting with you, but it's here in this moment sitting with you. There's just a sense of, this that's consciousness seeing itself, it sees its own light reflected back…in whatever form or shape or movement or whatever feeling…just whatever's here. It's not a sense of being other…We're not talking about something separate necessarily, but it's so easy to make it separate, there isn't somebody who's investigating or noticing the noticing, there's just being being. (theme #1 "Mutuality;" Theme #6 "Felt sense of No Division")

Ellen went on in her expression of the felt sense of mutuality in the following quote where she described the feeling of recognition and communication in the presence of another person. Ellen also referred to how her perceptual experience of others may change as in seeing their faces change, and in being able to feel how open they might be.

> There's a sense of something recognizing itself, not just here (points to herself), but over there as well (points to researcher), like *that* is communicated. How it's communicated would be a bit more difficult to try to describe, but sometimes there's an energetic feel to it…Something moves and delivers that message. Sometimes when I sit quietly with people I will see their faces change…There'll be a sense of…how open is this person? (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

Ellen expressed her felt sense of truth in describing the sense of clarity and obviousness in her experience. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> There's like a sense of clarity. There's a sense of obviousness…There's an accurateness in our experience…This whole interview from your perspective may feel very muddy, but from my perspective there's a certain clarity that I feel in my mind as it moves, you know, that it isn't second guessing itself. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

In the following quote Ellen described her felt sense of "Me-ness." This quote also illustrates a unique aspect of Ellen's experience which appeared to be in how important it was for her to articulate that NDC is not an object or experience possessed by a distinct and separate self. This is reflected in her careful and deliberate choice of words in describing the felt sense of "Me-Ness."

> It's more (pause) I would say, it is aware of itself. Do *I* have a felt sense of that? As *that*, there's a felt sense of myself. Does a separate little body-mind have that? No. That doesn't mean it doesn't operate or make itself felt in the body-mind. (theme #7 "Felt sense of Me-ness")

Ellen illustrated the felt sense of a bigger underlying movement in describing her experience of a movement of life, which she also described as the movement of love, in the following quote. As with other participants, Ellen suggested that this movement is an intelligent one, with a capacity for discerning. For Ellen, this movement is also connected to her felt sense of truth or clarity, described here.

> That is the movement of love…This that doesn't judge, that accepts what is for what is, it also sees—it's discerning…It is kind of simplistic I realize, but it just feels like everything just loves to be. Maybe love is too strong a word. But it just—being just loves to be, it just loves to be. And it's being as everything in every moment…This that we can't speak is actually…having these experiences…What's here is having a human experience…There's a felt sense of the trusting of whatever comes, you know, and that's what I mean by clarity, I don't mean I see everything so clearly necessarily, but just that there's a total trust in the movement of life

> without trying to second guess. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as expressed by participant #8: Laura.

Laura described her felt sense of a bigger underlying movement in the following quote in which she described, like others, the impersonal nature of this movement, and her capacity to respond to it by listening and opening. This quote also illustrates Laura's felt sense of "Me-Ness" by referring to the unique way in which this movement registers in her experience, distinct from someone else's experience.

> It's a lot more just opening and just seeing the impressions that come hit me or come to me and I tend to move a lot more by listening and opening and seeing what's obvious…Just more organically feeling how to respond or move in life. But it doesn't feel like so much *my* life or *my* path that I'm carving or *my* purpose or *my* story, it doesn't have the same sort of revolving around the sense of me…It doesn't quite feel so personal…It's kind of just more, what's obvious. And I wouldn't say that it's *not* my experience either, that's not exactly true because it does register in my body or my system in a very unique and particular way that's going to be different than somebody who had a different way of taking in the world, or different perspective or different vantage points. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement;" theme #7 "Felt sense of Me-ness")

A second example of Laura's felt sense of a bigger underlying movement is seen in the following quote where Laura described the intelligence that seems to be inherent in this movement.

> Sometimes I think of it as consciousness because it has this intelligence inherent in it...Sometimes it will move through the heart or through the voice…maybe it will register as specific things to say in my mind. Like if I'm teaching, almost like, "say this!" The words will literally come sometimes as a formed sentence that won't make sense to my mind at all, but when I say it, it'll make sense to the person… And if it's through the

> heart it's almost like a sense of presence, of stillness that moves, mushrooms out... It's almost like it has this intelligence and it knows how to move through different centers and touch the environment or whatever is around me…So you could say it's energy, but sometimes I call it consciousness because it feels so intelligent. (Theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

Laura continued to describe her felt sense of a bigger underlying movement in the following quote.

> I'm just living life. Life's living me. However you want to say it. It's all just unfolding on its own and it doesn't require any reflection or referencing. I kind of dance between those…And it doesn't mean to say that I don't haves—I do have an inherent appetite for harmony. So there is something in me, it's almost like a computer chip in me. It's just always on, that there's something in me that seeks that harmony. (theme #3 "Felt sense of A Bigger Underlying Movement")

In the following interchange with this researcher Laura described how she internally feels this movement in her body and her response to it. In her response, Laura illustrated her felt sense of truth, experienced as an "uncompromising clarity."

> Researcher: When you talk about harmony versus disharmony, how do you actually feel the difference?
>
> Laura: I mostly feel it in my gut….There'll be like a foot on the brake pedal inside my gut. Like a "no." And I'll just look at that. Feel into that kinesthetically…I kind of lean into it and just sort of hang out with it and then it tends to reveal, something tends to become clear…I just got to hang out with it until I can move in a way that doesn't feel so off the mark… Like one way that I have that's really apparent... is sort of this inner bullshit meter. Like if somebody's talking and it just doesn't ring true to me, it will literally go off in my gut...It's almost like this thing that just starts swinging…and literally just starts this energy inside that's very fierce…When I first started to experience it really acutely…I thought it was anger because it was rising up, sort of like, "this is bullshit!" You know, it may be felt as anger, but it could also really just be felt as uncompromising clarity…But often the disharmony isn't that drastic…sometimes it can just be really subtle, almost like something at the edge of my mind or the edge of my experience... It's not like it's way off the mark, but it's just a little bit rough or something. And if it's in

> thought I almost feel it like something that I'm almost on the edge of. If it's let's say, in the heart, it might be sort of like (pause) it's not as clear of a heart space. It almost feels like there's other emotions that might be in the room, like it's not like an open room, it's sort of like there's a few different energies that's not quite as clear or something. And if it's in the gut, that's when it's those feelings of—some version of holding or maybe some version of resistance or no…It's just kind of more like a stop. Stop. Pay attention. That kind of energy. (theme #2 "Felt sense of Truth")

Laura expressed her felt sense of mutuality in the following quote where she described, similar to other participants, the experience of unspoken communication that seems to occur between "the essence of people's spirits."

> If a person is bright who I'm in the company with, they don't even necessarily have to have like the visage of someone who is really bright, bright eyed or glowy, but…there's something in them that's very awake or bright or clear…Or, if I'm especially bright, it literally seems like the brightness factors talk to each other, or…somehow relate to one another…There is some way that…the essence of people's spirits, they seem to relate and respond, and dance together. And certainly I've noticed it's different with every persona and with each person in any given mood or time or setting…It's almost like people have this unconscious agreement, or maybe its conscious, this unspoken agreement I should say, that we're kind of meeting to nourish that brightness. (theme #1 "Felt sense of Mutuality")

Summary of primary category 2: Directly felt experience of nondual consciousness.

In summary, primary category 2 represents themes related to the directly felt experience of nondual consciousness, meaning the experience of NDC as it was being experienced by participants in real time during interviews. Data within this category was coded by identifying certain process indicators within interview transcripts and was divided into two subcategories, the first related to the essential

qualities of the felt experience of NDC, and the second reflecting the felt sense of NDC. As illustrated, multiple themes were identified within each subcategory.

Six essential qualities of the felt experience of NDC were identified, including qualities reflecting the ineffability of the experience of NDC, the experience of energy felt primarily in the body, the felt experience of well-being, the experience of NDC as being nonlocalized, of dynamic movement, and verticality. A summary of these themes was presented in Table 8: essential qualities of the felt experience of nondual consciousness.

Seven themes representing the felt sense of NDC were also identified. These were a felt sense of mutuality, of truth, of a bigger underlying movement, of openness, of form and formlessness, of no division, and of “Me-ness.” A summary of these themes was presented in Table 9: the felt sense of nondual consciousness. The relationship between these subcategories, their corresponding themes, and a discussion regarding the overall results and their implications are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study aimed to (a) capture and describe the inwardly felt experience of nondual consciousness (NDC) and reflections about NDC, and (b) explore and examine the conditions, situations, and context for NDC. In addition to these aims, several research questions were posed including (a) what is the felt experience of NDC as described by individuals familiar and adept at experiencing in this way? (b) In what ways, if any, is the felt experience of NDC parallel to the experiential process described by models such as those in the therapeutic domain (i.e., Gendlin and Welwood), and (c) Is the actual felt experience of NDC true to the theoretical description thus far primarily written about, taught, and described within the spiritual traditions, but not systemically examined through scholarly research?

This chapter includes a discussion of the results presented in Chapter 4, their meaning, and their relevance to these research questions. Implications of the results in regards to psychological and transpersonal theory, as well as spirituality, are presented. Finally, the overall clinical implications of the results, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Discussion of Results for Primary Category 1: Presence of Nondual Consciousness in One's Life

Primary category 1 reflected results concerning the presence of nondual consciousness (NDC) within each participant's life. Included in this category

were themes related to the terminology participants used in reference to NDC, ideas regarding the nature of NDC, the presence of NDC as a process over time, and finally, the supports, impact and conditions related to the experience of NDC for each participant.

Discussion of terminology related to the experience of nondual consciousness.

In terms of the subcategory related to terminology, results clearly illustrated what was also reflected in the literature in that what is termed "nondual consciousness" is arguably not referring to the same phenomenon among all individuals. However, the results also suggest that common qualities are found in the felt experiences described by participants, although the terms they used may differ. In other words, it could be asked, to what extent is the felt experience of what we call NDC described by individuals the same phenomenon regardless of the terms used to refer to the experience?

The multitude of terms offered by participants, including the use of gestures and metaphors, and the fluidity with which terms are used depending on content and context, reveal that we may never come to a singular term for this experience. In fact, it may not be a desirable outcome to do so. I am in agreement with statements made by several participants that terms can become conceptually solidified when used repeatedly, and therefore reinforce a dualistic split continually enforced by the discursive mind. Participants who most clearly stated this viewpoint were those that had either experienced relative stabilization of

NDC or who may have been familiar with models of spiritual development that also assert this viewpoint in their theologies. This may be an illustration of Forman's (1998) assertion that, although the phenomenon described is recognizably the same, interpretations of these experiences and their significance regarding the nature of the universe varies. People's beliefs about how best to talk about their experiences, or the terminology they use, is also significantly informed by their personal histories and traditions.

In regards to the issue of terminology, Sophia (p#5) suggested that having words that might better contextualize her experience was something she desired. I imagine that participants who described a period of seeking out NDC may also have at one point yearned for more concrete terms to understand their experience, even though they may have come to experience those very terms as a limitation over time.

It is interesting that, although most participants in this study did not prefer the term "nondual consciousness," several participants offered definitions of NDC that were quite similar to one another, suggesting that consistent definitions for this phenomenon may in fact exist. These definitions were also aligned with the definition offered in this dissertation, which defines NDC as those experiences in which one's sense of internal self ("I") is no longer experienced as separate from external phenomena (world). For example, Sophia (p#5) defined NDC in this way:

> It's almost like you no longer feel that there's a boundary between yourself and the other part that- the self and the part that's outside the self- there is no longer—you can't even use those words any more. That that boundary has melted, softened, dissolved.

Ellen's (p#7) definition was similar. However, here she pointed to what I would argue is one of the reasons for the ambiguity in definitions and the understanding of NDC, namely that it is far more than just an experience of subject/object oneness.

> If I were to try to define it I would say, awareness with no subject and no object, that would be a simple definition to me, about as good as I could get. Is that *it*? Like, what is it that has no subject and no object? Could I say? No, I can't. That's a total mystery. It's a total mystery.

It is here that we begin to see what may be one of the primary reasons for the difficulty in talking and writing about NDC, and subjective experience in general. Namely, that even if we are able to come close to a near perfect description of a particular phenomenon, actual experience will always defy the level of words alone. In many ways it is easier to say what NDC is not; this is seen repeatedly in what has been written about NDC, as described in the literature review. Nonetheless participants in this study were in fact able to speak to their direct experience and offer some insights into the felt sense of NDC, to be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Robert (p#4) further articulated this point regarding a definition of NDC and his sense of his own unfolding process:

> Probably the most common meaning of nonduality is that form and formless are not different. Emptiness is form and form is emptiness, and I think this is a valid definition. No one looks out and sees that it is everything, that's the perceptional expression of nondual awareness. No one looks out and sees it's everything. But there's still a subtler dimension I think of nonduality which is beyond all of that…which is more like a dark mystery I would say. And there's a growing felt sense of that…but there's nothing that could be said about it as well. So it feels like the movement is in that direction.

Robert's statement further supports what was alluded to by Ellen, who referred to an extremely significant aspect of the experience of NDC regarding the nature of consciousness: namely, that there is something even more subtle than the immediate experience itself. This issue that will be further explored later in this chapter.

Discussion of the experience of nondual consciousness as a process over time.

Results in this study offered several important insights regarding the development of the experience of NDC as a process developing over time. Firstly, regarding theoretical arguments concerning NDC being a process of realization over time versus a realization made in full and at once, results in this study are in agreement with recent dissertations by Paul (2008) and Costeines (2009) as well as those theoretical models that posit a developmental, though nonlinear, process. Both studies found that participants who had been recognized as having realized NDC generally described a process developing over time, often many years. Participants in these studies described multiple stages in their process, often including "awakenings," in which one's true nature is seen and experienced, but does not remain as an ongoing and fixed realization, with the stabilization of this awareness often coming many years later. Both Paul and Costeines describe this process as one of subtraction, particularly of one's conditioned experience of the world and self, versus addition, as is more common in traditional psychological

models of health that aim to strengthen the ego. These findings were in line with those found in this study as well.

Regardless of the specifics of the process itself, participants described a process over time. For some participants, descriptions of this process included the development of more defined boundaries, as for Judith (p#3) and Sophia (p#5); for others the emphasis in their descriptions was on the ways in which previously defined constructs fell away. Whatever aspect was described as significant in the overall process, most participants described an overall process leading to ever-greater experiences of space, spaciousness, and silence, as well as an ongoing deepening, clarity, and sense of fullness.

In terms of some of the specific aspects of this process described and presented in the results, several comments can be made. The first is related to the first theme coded as "early experiences of NDC." In many ways it seems that participants described two different types of experiences coded as early experiences. The first were experiences in which participants seemed to emphasize a conscious awareness of pre-egoic experiences that were then lost. This is seen, for example, when Steven (p#2) described his experience of being 2 years old and remembering the moment that a "sense of separation" entered his experience, or when Sophia (p#5) described the discomfort in experiencing some sense of NDC as a child and choosing to "get [her] shit together" in response.

The second types of experiences seemed to be those in which the emphasis was on the re-experiencing of pre-egoic consciousness later in life once ego development had more fully occurred. It seemed that for participants who

emphasized the latter type of early experiences, re-experiencing often triggered a sense of reconnecting with something that had been lost, and somewhat forgotten, and consequently ushering in a stage of seeking out these experiences. Examples of this are seen in Robert's (p#4) description of meditating for the second time in his life and reconnecting with experiences he had had as a young boy falling asleep, or when Ben (p#6) described being in his 20s and reconnecting with "the sense of the truest thing" which he had felt as an adolescent when he meditated for the first time. For several participants, these experiences occurred when they were in their early 20s.

The third theme described in regards to NDC as a process over time related to "experiences of NDC although a sense of separate self remains." Interestingly, for some participants the experience of a separate self was described as a positive experience, possibly a development from the pre-egoic experiences which had been uncomfortable and without context. For others, the experience of a separate self was indicative of a remaining dualism between their experience and some constructed sense of self, an experience implying that the process was not complete. This theme and the fourth theme related to the "experience of doubt or uncertainty regarding NDC," may simply be ways of describing common experiences along the process of ego dissolution and deconditioning. It is unclear from the results of this study whether or not these are experiences that inevitably and predictably arise within the process of NDC or are experienced by some people, but not others. If the latter is the case, further inquiry into why and how

these experiences emerge for some and not others would be an area of further inquiry.

The fifth theme regarding the description of NDC as a process over time relates to the "stabilization of NDC." One way to understand this theme might be that stabilization simply refers to the stabilization of consciousness' awakeness to itself, not the stabilization of the content of ongoing felt experiences. In other words, the experience of NDC as felt by an individual may ebb and flow, vacillate in intensity, move from foreground to background; however, the fundamental knowing or awakening to oneself as consciousness does not change. If conceptualized in this way, it makes logical sense that the stabilization of NDC would also be connected to the end of seeking (what is to be sought?) and the end of doubt or uncertainty (why have any doubt of what is known?). This stabilization process will be further explored later in this chapter.

Another way to understand this theme might be that stabilization refers not only to the fundamental awakening of consciousness to itself, but also to an ongoing process of integration or embodiment of what has been awakened to. In the words of Ellen (p#7), this might be described as the difference between an "awakening" and "being awake." Additionally, this may be similar to and therefore validating of Blackstone's (2005) distinction between nondual experience and nondual realization. As will be further explored in this chapter, this may also be, in the words of John Welwood (2000), the difference between vertical and horizontal shifts in development, with stabilization referring to an overall process of psychospiritual development. However, the results in this study

do suggest that stabilization implies having experienced fundamental changes in one's ego structure, not merely an awareness of vertical and horizontal shifts. One way or another, participants who described what was coded as "stabilization" all referred to the process of NDC as a continual unfolding with no end, just deepening. In fact, one of the insights of NDC seems to be the realization that there is no end to the process and nothing to be achieved. What is being sought is the seeker, what is to be achieved has always been here, and any endpoint is merely a doorway. If there is anything that ends, it is the argument with oneself about there being some goal or endpoint. As with other aspects of this theme and the overall results related to NDC as a process over time, additional comments will be made later in this chapter.

Discussion of the supports, impacts, and conditions related to the experience of nondual consciousness.

Results in this study reveal that, although NDC is theoretically independent of anything, as far as the *experience* of NDC is concerned, specific supports, impacts, and conditions were clearly described by participants. Participants identified the impact of teachers and teachings as supportive in their experience, suggesting that the impact of external guidance is significant even if the experience of NDC requires no conceptual or theoretical understanding. All 8 participants also identified practices supportive of their experience of NDC. This was especially interesting because of the anecdotal experience, reflected on by some participants during their interviews, that there are teachings and teachers

who often deride practices as unnecessary or inhibiting of the process of NDC. My sense is that these negative teachings are in response to the use of practices as a means of obtaining, holding on to, or manipulating particular states or experiences in an effort to "achieve" NDC. The possibility of practices being used in just this way was also commented on by participants who warned against the use of practices as becoming conditioned or manipulated. However, overwhelmingly, participants expressed the importance of practices for their overall experience of NDC.

Regarding the impact of NDC identified by participants, all participants described the experience of NDC as having a positive and profound impact on their lives. Several participants also described ways that the experience of NDC created havoc or turmoil for them at various moments. For example, some participants described how the impact of more clarity meant that some of the ways they were engaging in their lives felt dissonant with their internal experience, or that being engaged in certain relationships no longer felt aligned with what felt true. As can be expected, this created interpersonal difficulties for these participants. They described how these disruptions and even upheavals, although painful and difficult at times, were experienced within a context that was felt to be inherently intelligent, that was guiding the process, and that was profoundly significant and positive. This was expressed by all participants regardless of the extent to which NDC had stabilized in their lives.

All 8 participants also identified enhancing and inhibiting conditions related to the experience of NDC. Several observations can be made in reference

to this finding. The first is the basic finding that all participants mentioned at least one enhancing and one inhibiting condition for the experience of NDC. Similar to comments made about practices, this is noteworthy when considered against the often cited theoretical description of NDC as being completely independent of any particular condition. If describing NDC as an absolute, this is entirely sensible. However, in speaking of the experience of NDC and its functioning in human form, evidently there are conditions that affect the experience itself. For those participants who described a relative stabilization of NDC, conditions appear to affect the sense of openness to or contact with NDC, but not to the fundamental awakeness to NDC. For participants who described NDC as fluctuating, these conditions seemed to affect the subjective sense of NDC being present or absent.

Discussion of Results for Primary Category 2: Directly Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness Itself

The first and primary research question posed in this study was: What is the felt experience of NDC as described by individuals familiar with and adept at experiencing this way? Implicit in this first question is the assumption that there is in fact something that can be called the "felt experience" of NDC. Although this may seem to be a simple and obvious assertion, the results from this dissertation clearly support this assumption. The results which were presented as primary category 2 aimed to illustrate some of the qualities of this experience. Included in this category were the essential qualities and overall felt sense of NDC.

In attempting to examine the directly felt experience of NDC, what was captured was clearly a snapshot in time during the research interview, alongside participants' reflections of their experience over time illustrated by the themes in primary category 1. As many participants in this study suggested, NDC itself is not an encapsulated experienced separate from other experiences. Therefore, the results from this study, and arguably any study, cannot define "the experience of NDC," in its entirety. What this study does describe is an important area of discussion further explored here.

Consistently expressed in various ways by all participants regardless of their experiences, was that NDC is not an isolated experience, but rather a development of who they are over time, which may include distinct and important experiences in time, but not reducible to any one of these alone. Even when a participant described NDC as "non-abiding" meaning it has not stabilized and fluctuates, they alluded to the significance of their experiences of NDC, and the intertwined nature of NDC in their lives as a whole. Ben (p#6) stated that his experience of NDC, "is the most important thing" in his life. Sophia (p#5) who also described a fluctuating experience of NDC in her life also referred to her sense that her overall experience of NDC surpassed any one experience alone. Even the isolated experience of NDC in the moment is felt, "like it could go so deeply and kind of unravel in some way."

If NDC cannot be reduced to one experience alone then, concurrent with what Ellen (p#7) expressed prior to her interview, this study may have captured the experience of NDC as it is functioning, meaning as it is being experienced by

and manifests through form, in this case, as a human being. In an email to this researcher prior to her interview, Ellen (p#7) wrote in reference to this study that,

> it is about the felt sense of awakened consciousness as it is *functioning,* as it is seeing itself, meeting itself, experiencing itself, etc. But this is not a *description of* "nondual awareness."

If this is the case, then is this unique to the exploration of NDC or would this be true for any phenomenological inquiry? By its very essence, subjective experience is only truly known from the inside. The study *of* experience will always by its nature be an examination from the outside, no matter how close to the source we are able to get. However, when words emerge in the midst of *being,* perhaps these words, like any other creative expression are one possible reflection of the experience itself. Like the parable of the wise men describing an elephant in a dark room, NDC cannot be defined by words alone, just as the elephant cannot be defined by any one of its disparate parts. However, like the tail or ear of the elephant, to discount the words themselves or the snapshot of an experience may be to ignore a significant aspect of the whole. Semantics aside, participants' descriptions of their experience seem to suggest that there is a felt sense of their experience of NDC. Even for those participants whose experience of NDC was in the *being* that occurred without words during the interview, the palpability of the experience was unquestioned.

Discussion of the essential qualities and felt sense of nondual consciousness.

The results presented as primary category 2, referring to the essential qualities and felt sense of NDC, represent an attempt to delineate some of the specific experiential qualities of NDC as a phenomenon. As with any phenomenological inquiry, there is an inevitable process of reducing an experience into different and even distinct aspects, even if the overall aim is to describe the essence of the phenomenon itself. In the case of the results of this study, this requires a dialogical process where the experience of NDC was examined and distilled into finer and finer aspects and these finer aspects were constantly compared back to the overall sense of the experience as described. Several comments can be made regarding the results for primary category 2 and their relationship to one another.

First, what is the relationship between subcategory 1, the “essential qualities” defined and subcategory 2, the various themes referring to the “felt sense of NDC” that were identified? Subcategory 1, referring to the “essential qualities” of the felt experience of NDC, represents qualities that were expressed regardless of the content of the experience described. For example, “verticality” describes a way in which a particular experience is felt, but does not necessarily describe what that experience is. In contrast, the themes identified in regards to subcategory 2, the “felt sense of NDC” could be said to represent different distinctly felt aspects of NDC. Combined together, these felt aspects represent the overall felt sense of NDC. In a way, subcategory 2 is a description of various

strands that when braided together represent the felt experience of NDC, whereas subcategory 1 includes all of the different descriptive qualities of the braid itself. Although the strands can be separated and described independently, no one strand represents or describes the experience of NDC.

Like Gendlin's felt sense, when participant's connected to and described the felt experience of NDC, what was revealed is that it did move, or shift. For example, the sense of "truth" was felt as an internally rising force for Laura (p#8). The felt sense of "openness" included a sensation of opening or deepening that felt like a buzzing that moved up and down, for Ben (p#6). For Sophia (p#5) the sense of "a bigger underlying movement" was a strong pulling force that was without location, and moved vertically in a downwards direction. Steven (p#2) described his sense of "me-ness" as a distinct flavor that was without specific location, yet included a feeling of aliveness experienced energetically.

Second, what can be said, if anything, about the relationship between the specific themes, represented by subcategory 2, reflecting the felt sense of NDC itself? What was seen clearly in the results of this study was that when asked to feel into their direct experience of NDC, participants were generally able to do so without question. In so doing, some participants were not only able to feel into their immediate experience, but into an even more subtle aspect, what might be called the source of their experience. This source, however, was essentially without immediately felt characteristics, and was referred to as a mystery and completely unknown by those who referred to it. Feeling into both their immediate experience and the more ineffable source of their experience may be

one of the reasons why describing and understanding NDC is so theoretically challenging. Arguably, there is nothing to describe if there is nothing immediately felt, and so it may be that all that can ever be described is what is at the edge or already emerging from this ineffable source. As Ellen (p#7) wrote in an email prior to her interview,

> The truth of "not Two" reveals itself, can be felt experientially but in its deepest revelation can never be described because the mind to observe and describe ceases, subsumed by the Mystery. How would we describe the "experience" of dreamless sleep, for example?

In understanding this distinction in experience, a differentiation between what might be called the absolute level or source of experience in contrast to the phenomenal level of experience is offered.

Absolute and phenomenal levels of experience.

In general, results from this study suggest that to describe NDC in reference to what is immediately felt, in other words the level of phenomena, as well as a more ineffable aspect or source of what is felt, referred to as the absolute level, is to describe two sides of the same coin, distinct, but inseparable. The absolute level relates to the aspect of NDC completely free of any dualistic characteristics. As some participants put it, the absolute is comparable to the ocean or the sky. In contrast, the phenomenal level refers to the aspect of NDC that relates to phenomena, to form. This level is comparable to the waves or clouds that emerge from the ocean or sky; not fundamentally different, but distinct nonetheless. This is the level that many participants referred to as

dualistic. Although not included in the results chapter, several quotes from participants are offered here in illustration of these levels.

In his description of "mystery" or "ground," in contrast to an interior movement Steven (p#2) illustrated the distinction between absolute and phenomenal levels of experience.

> The mystery to me is the background out of which everything is coming, interrelated fabric that ties everything together…I would distinguish between the ground which to me never goes off and a movement interiorly…we are in a way different manifestations of that underlying unity.

Robert (p#4) described these levels in the following way:

> Paradoxically, on some level, nothing is happening. That's the absolute level. But on the phenomenal level the realization of that has its impact on a particular body mind. It's always unique…So, dualism is unavoidable in the sense that, as long as we're living in a phenomenal life, it's all duality. It's all light and dark, male and female, it's all differentiated and polarized. So in that sense it's unavoidable…So, on the level of the waves, it's all duality. And on the level of the ocean, there's not duality.

In the following quote, Laura (p#8) described these two levels by using the terms "true nature" and "human nature."

> To even say true nature versus this human nature, I know that it's not really true, but I don't know how else to talk about it…And I'll laugh because I'll know it's not the case, but sometimes when I'm in the midst of explaining something it's almost like I'm believing that there's a human self, that there is a true self that's apart from anything else, when it's not apart from anything else. I mean that's almost its definition—this true self knows no apart from…And so I think when I speak about my true self it's a way to put a word on (pause) a knowingness that doesn't close, doesn't close to human experience whether it's in accordance or in discord or is pleasant or is unpleasant. It literally doesn't know how to close to that. Whether we want to call that "awareness that never sleeps," whether we want to call that a knowing- knowingness that recognizes opposites. It could be called many things…our essential nature is untouched and undefined by anything.

Ellen (p#7) distinguished between these two levels by describing that which is prior to consciousness, which she refers to as “awareness” (absolute), and then the movement, experience, or expression from this place (phenomenal), which is distinguished by consciousness. In an email communication with this researcher prior to the interview, Ellen stated the following:

> It is impossible to use words when we have encountered the deepest Source, because at that point there is not only nothing “separate” that exists, Nothing (definable) exists—literally…this unfathomable Mystery (what is called Nondual Awareness/Awaring—without those words) is unborn, undying. It is prior to consciousness. With Consciousness, we have self, world, other, words, thoughts, and depending on conditioning, God…But true Nondual Awareness has no subject and no object, is indefinable, unknowable, indescribable, un-thought, cannot be made into an object. It is where the mind stops; there is no experience and no experiencer.

During the interview itself, Ellen offered these comments related to these two levels, describing also the dualistic and nondualistic nature of each:

> There are no degrees of awareness, there are different degrees of experience…to me, consciousness itself is operating in the dual world, I mean if there’s no consciousness, there’s no self, there’s no world and that to me is the total nondual source. You know, when it starts to move, it moves in duality, it doesn’t mean that the understanding is that you’re separate necessarily, but…it’s kind of like all of life is in duality, but that’s not in opposition to nonduality, the two aren’t really two, if that’s what nondual means. It doesn’t mean the opposite of duality. It’s not separate from it.

For these participants, the felt experience of NDC, with its source and manifest aspects, is like the yin-yang, an intertwined sensing of both that which is formless moving through and as form; within form is the formless and within the formless is form. This is what Paul (p#1) seemed to be referring to when he said, “there’s the openness, but then also there’s the responsivity that comes out of the openness, the spark, the sparkliness, the liveliness.” This is what seems to be

referred to when participants described a sense of stillness or silence that always resides internally, or when Paul referred to "a wakeful stillness." It seems likely that all of these descriptions are articulations of the experience of emptiness as presented for example in the *Prajnaparamita*, in which form and emptiness are one. In terms of the results of this study, the concept of absolute and phenomenal levels may simply be a framework by which to further understand the various themes reflecting the overall felt sense of NDC.

The felt sense of nondual consciousness as related to models of consciousness.

In many ways we might say that the description of absolute and phenomenal levels of experience is simply one way of conceptualizing the theme related to the felt sense of "form and formlessness." Additionally, the theme representing the felt sense of "no division" could be seen as intimately connected to the concept of absolute and phenomenal levels of experience. In the feeling of both that which is with form and that which is formless, one no longer experiences a fundamental separation or division between one's self and everything else, or within aspects of one's internal experience as well. Consciousness is undivided, both from what is experienced internally and from its movement in the form of everything outside as well.

The theme referring to a sense of "a bigger underlying movement" may reflect the felt experience of the movement of consciousness or life (for lack of a better term) as it moves from source or ground into form. Several participants

described experiences “on the edge” of their awareness and this movement was one of these. When asked to direct attention to their immediate experience, this movement, like Gendlin’s felt sense, came to have a very clear directionality to it in its movement. We might then say that the sense of this movement, felt at the edge of experience, then moves through and is registered by the body-mind. This movement felt in the body-mind, seems then to be what is experienced as a sense of “truth,” which seemed to be felt primarily in reference to one’s alignment with the movement itself.

The theme referring to the sense of “openness,” as described, could be seen as merely one more description of the formless side of the sense of form and formlessness. Another interpretation is that the sense of “openness” is more dynamic, related to one’s receptivity to the movement itself, described in the previous paragraph. In other words, openness might refer to some aspect of the container through which the sense of “a bigger underlying movement” moves through. Interestingly, for participants like Judith (p#3) and Sophia (p#5), who described early experiences in which they felt extremely open and without defined boundaries, the creation of a container also appears to be important in the overall experience of then feeling the sense of “openness.” Laura (p#8), among other participants, also alluded to the importance of having a felt experience of a clear container when she described the usefulness of practices in grounding her energy in such a way as to feel that the sense of openness was more clarified. This is an interesting paradox that seems important: that the sense of openness for

some may be more acutely experienced in relation to their sense of clearly felt boundaries.

One could infer from participant's statements that the more open they felt the more acutely and easily they felt all other aspects of NDC. In regards to the felt sense of "openness," the primary distinction that seemed to be made by participants who had experienced a stabilization of NDC as compared to other participants was that, regardless of conditions, the sense of "openness" never closed. Developmentally, some participants even referred to a moment in which this openness "turned on" in a more permanent way. Steven (p#2), for example, described this in the following way:

> There was a moment that the light switch got turned on and somebody soldered the wires. I'm always aware that the wires could come unsoldered because I'm not in control, but I put that aside for a moment, for years now, that sense of foreground being pervaded by background has stayed steady.

The theme referring to a sense of "Me-Ness" seems to reflect the individual experience of one's distinctiveness as compared to what is "not me." Interestingly, this theme was primarily described by and coded for those participants who had experienced more stabilization of NDC. This finding can possibly be understood in reference to theoretical ideas about the development of NDC. For example, if the development of NDC over time, as articulated by Paul (2008) and Costeines (2009), is essentially a process of subtraction of the various identifications and conditioning which come to be experienced as a discrete sense of "I," then depending on where one is in their development, it makes sense that over time, the experience of NDC or unitive consciousness would come to

dominate one’s experience, and that the sense of “Me” would move into the background. In contrast, this may be one of the reasons why, in earlier experiences of NDC, one’s experience of unitive consciousness is literally sensed as a series of experiences within one’s constructed sense of self. So it may be that for those participants whose consciousness is predominated by a sense of constructed self, the felt sense of “Me-Ness” is not really experienced because it is taken to be the backdrop from which experience happens. Whereas for those participants who have both awakened to an understanding of the self as being a construction, and who have experienced a stabilization of this knowing, the backdrop of experience is not dominated by the constructed self. Yet, a flavor or sense of self or “Me” comes through, suggesting that, even when consciousness has awakened to itself, a distinctive essence or flavor of each individual being remains.

Discussion of the felt sense of mutuality.

The final theme identified in regards to the felt sense of NDC was a felt sense of “mutuality.” This finding is related to the other themes just discussed, and in a way stands somewhat separate from them and is an area worthy of its own discussion, and further research. The felt sense of “mutuality” essentially refers to the experience of awakened consciousness in the presence of another person. In the context of this dissertation this theme referred to what was coded in reference to participants’ experience in direct relation to myself as the researcher. To what extent results related to this theme are specific to the experience with

myself or to other individuals as well is unclear. Several participants did, however, make reference to their experiences of NDC in the presence of other individuals in their lives, and the specific qualities of mutuality that they described were comparable to the experience during the interview.

One of the most intriguing things about this theme is that, in addition to specific references to the bodily sense of NDC in general, very little has been written about the experience of NDC with others. What has been written has generally focused on NDC's impact *on* relationships, such as participants' descriptions of experiencing more ease and trust in their relationships. This theme may be related to some somatic theories in psychology describing "the interpersonal field," or even in psychodynamic theory regarding the experience of dynamics such as projective identification, where the actual feeling of individual phenomenon as it is experienced interpersonally is emphasized. Within the psychological literature, probably the most that has been referred to regarding interpersonal phenomena is in transpersonal or spiritually-oriented psychotherapies that do make reference to the possible impact of the therapist on the client.

From these perspectives, it is theorized that the client's development can be impacted, influenced, and facilitated by the consciousness of the therapist. The findings related to the theme of mutuality offer support to this theory as well as suggest an intriguing area of further study. This theme further supports some discussions related to the concept of transmission in the spiritual traditions, in which the more developed or realized consciousness of teachers can actually

facilitate or transmit to students. Aside from these areas, little has been written about this phenomenon in the psychological literature.

Related to this theme is also how the coding team, aside from myself, was affected by reviewing the transcripts during the coding process. Coders described moments where they experienced altered states of consciousness and felt themselves to have an understanding of the material in a way that was nonordinary. Although a full commentary on the coder's experience is limited because this was not the primary area of focus in the analysis of the data, my own experience during interviews was quite profound and is worthy of some commentary. It is important to note, however, that these comments are made primarily because of the significance of my own experience as it emerged in the context of these interviews. Any conclusion about the meaning of these experiences in regards to participants' experiences of NDC or the nature of NDC in general, cannot fairly be drawn, nor is it my intention to do so here.

Congruent with participant's descriptions of NDC, my own experiences during these interviews is difficult to put into words. For lack of a better description, in the context of many of the interviews I felt the entire energetic field of the space change in ways that were quite similar to the descriptions of participants themselves. This was most interesting, and validated, in the moments where participants themselves commented on the mutually felt experience. One example is from the interview with Ben (p#6) in which he and I sat in silence during one part of the interview. In the silence, I had a feeling at one point that the

energy surrounding me became denser. It was a very palpable shift in my own experience. At this moment, Ben commented:

> Ben: Something shifted. How are you?
>
> Researcher: (smiles). I'm good.
>
> Ben: Did you just experience something, a minute ago?
>
> Researcher: I felt the shift.

In my interview with Ellen (p#7) a similar experience occurred. After speaking about NDC for some time, and asking Ellen to reflect on her experience in the moment, this interchange occurred:

> Ellen: Well, I would just invite us now not to use words and just see if it feels like words are inhibiting, but instead focus on what is always here.

Ellen and I sat in silence for about a minute and in the silence various physical sensations were quite palpable, including distinct sensations in my chest, head, and belly, all of which were then referred to by Ellen.

> Ellen: So, I'll talk as we sit in the experience here. I'd be curious to hear from you as well. But there's a sense of light that is around everything. It's around you. If I'm quiet, there's a sense of the energetic, of energetic resonance, certain energy centers seem to be more -enlivened we could say than others…the three centers that were, where I felt the most exchange of energy or information or whatever were the heart, the solar plexus and the head, and that sense of, you know, the feeling of more energy in the back of the head than in the front, like something's…I don't know whether its moving front to back or whether it's just there, but at any rate…those were the most prominent resonances that I felt as we were just sitting here.

Ellen then went on to say,

> So I'm just going to invite you to do one thing more. Instead of paying attention to any of this, just *be* it. (Silence approximately 20 seconds)…And that's the difference between talking about it, writing about it, and being it. I don't know that there's anything wrong with the first two, but it isn't the same experience, is it?

Researcher: No.

Ellen: It's a different flavor, you know. We're not talking about something separate necessarily, but it's so easy to make it separate. There isn't somebody who's investigating or noticing the noticing, there's just being *being*. Just being, and then it's really all being, there's nothing we need to figure out, nothing even that's needed to be helpful. I mean that's how I feel. I mean really, like, who needs help? (laughs).

Ellen's comments resonated with my own experience as if, as some participants suggested, there was a contagious quality to what was occurring between the two of us.

This was not a unique experience for me with just Ellen and Ben, but something I felt in all of the interviews to some extent. My own experience was that the feeling of NDC was most palpable during the moments that participants stated that they were most directly experiencing NDC themselves. For example, with participants who described a stabilization of NDC in their lives, like Steven (p#2), Ellen (p#7), and Laura (p#8) my internal sensations of a shift in consciousness began almost the minute we sat down for the interviews. This was my overall experience with Robert (p#4) although he stated that his experience of NDC was that it fluctuates. Nonetheless it may be that, in the context of our conversation, that his experience of NDC was predominant. With other participants, such as Ben (p#6) and Sophia (p#5), I experienced a shift in my own consciousness in the moments that they later indicated that they had experienced something themselves.

With Paul (p#1) and Judith (p#3) my experience of NDC was not quite as palpable in comparison. One reason for this may be that in the case of Paul,

coders identified in review of his transcript that compared to other participants, his descriptions were somewhat more abstract and theoretical in nature. Judith was the only interview that was conducted over the phone and it is likely that the experience of speaking on the phone and my own divided attention, because I was attending to the recording of the conversation, was a significant factor influencing my experience.

It is unclear what the relationship is between one's own felt experience of NDC and that of others. However, the fact that all of the participants in this study described shifts in their own experiences of NDC in the presence of others, and that significantly felt experiences were described by the coding team and felt by me, clearly suggests that the relationship aspect of NDC is worthy of further study.

Discussion of Nondual Consciousness in regards to Models Described by Eugene Gendlin and John Welwood.

The second research question posed in this study was: In what ways, if any, is the felt experience of NDC parallel to the experiential process described by models such as those in the therapeutic domain (i.e., Gendlin and Welwood)? A number of comments can be made in reference to the results of this study and to the models presented in the therapeutic domain, particularly the relevant writings of Eugene Gendlin and John Welwood as outlined in the review of literature in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

In reference to experiential process research in general, it is striking that all participants in this study were able to sense and describe the felt aspects of their experience of NDC. As mentioned, Paul (p#1) was the only participant who described his experience more often in reference to theoretical constructs or abstractions and this is reflected by the relative paucity of felt descriptions presented for Paul as compared to other participants in the results chapter. However, even Paul offered some description of his experience when directly asked to do so. Of note, at no point did research questions directly ask participants to describe their physical or bodily experience, only to describe their experience of NDC as it was occurring in the moment. How can we explain the ease with which participants were able to describe their internal experience in just the way that Gendlin, for example, suggested was so important for therapeutic change?

One possible explanation is that, due to the fact that many participants identified their occupations as psychotherapists, they are already accustomed to and adept at investigating their internal experience in just this way, as they might with their clients. It is merely an assumption, however, that psychotherapists would generally be more capable of experiencing in this way, especially given that a more thorough investigation into the participants' styles of working with clients, theoretical orientations, and overall understanding of models such as Focusing was not undertaken. If, however, this were true, it would be interesting to investigate whether this capacity is a precondition for NDC.

Another explanation might be that one byproduct of NDC is that it draws people closer to their internal experience. As Ben (p#6) put it, "it's like lights out

to the frontal lobe," suggesting that the experience of NDC draws him out of his conceptual mind and into the felt experience in his body. Along with other participants, Ben went on to describe his experience of NDC as including a "dropping into" his experience. As Sophia (p#5) stated, "it's from the neck down." These descriptions however do not necessarily imply that NDC draws people into their felt experience, but rather that the experience of NDC is literally felt in the body, particularly below the head.

It could be argued that if drawn into the subjective experience of *anything*, people may always refer to a felt sense of that experience. While this may be true, Gendlin's research seems to suggest that the ability to attend to one's experience in this particular way is unique and does not necessarily come with ease, especially without guidance in the process, thus the development of Gendlin's Focusing technique. I suggest that the reason for this capacity on the part of participants in this study has something to do with both the nature of NDC itself *and* its effects on the body-mind.

In regards to the nature of NDC itself, results suggested that, true to theory about NDC, participants' experience of NDC is not merely a conceptual one. As illustrated in previous quotes, participants described their felt experience as being primarily below the neck. Several participants literally described their felt sense that experience in general was no longer in the head. Steven (p#2) offered this description, pointing to the specific importance of the heart center:

> I don't feel I'm looking from here, from the eyes. I feel like I'm looking from…the heart. Is there an actual location? No. Because the moment I look for a location, it's an everywhere looking. But yet there's a- there's something I can't dismiss, which is the sense of the localization of the

> body as an instrument…All the other organs, the stomach and the throat and the eyes, they all come in at times, but I can feel a different shift if I go intellectual than I can feel a kind of head center, but that feels top heavy and that feels like it's getting its information from the heart. So that feels like the access point, it feeds the rest of the system.

Robert (#4) also referred to the heart as a place from which NDC was felt:

> These are essential qualities I'm describing, but the felt sense… they all kind of center in the mid-chest and the heart center.

Participants also described how certain body centers, including, but not limited to their heart center, were most energetically felt in their experience of NDC. Ellen (p#7) for example referred to how she most strongly felt "an energetic exchange" in the back of her head, heart, and solar plexus as she sat with me during the interview. This was illustrated by quotes presented in the previous section. Ben (p#6) referred to his sense of openness in his heart and "cleansing" in his belly. Robert (p#4) also referred to increased sensation in his belly, offering a perspective on how the physical sensing of various body centers may be connected to the overall development of NDC over time. He offered this statement:

> It's one thing to realize our divinity, the infinite nature of consciousness. That's a great, tremendous realization, it's so freeing and yet it's not sufficient. It's like—that's the transcendent and the realization of the immanent is much more demanding I think, it requires a lot more maturity. It requires the heart to fully open and it requires the *hara* to fully open.

These quotes as well as the overall results themselves suggest that the experience of NDC itself is intimately connected with bodily felt experiences.

Discussion of nondual consciousness, Eugene Gendlin, and Focusing.

Specifically related to the work of Eugene Gendlin, some comparisons can be made about the results of this study. For one, as previously mentioned, when participants were able to come into contact with and describe their felt experience of NDC in the moment, like Gendlin's description of the felt sense, their experience was felt in the body, and, when attended to, it changed. It was not the intention of this study to guide participants through the six movements of the Focusing method, but rather to explicate the felt sense or felt experience of NDC. Nonetheless, some interesting comparisons can be drawn between the findings in this study and Focusing.

As described in detail in the review of the literature in Chapter 2, Gendlin's Focusing method includes the following six movements: the process of clearing a space, coming into contact with a felt sense, getting a handle on it, resonating with the handle, asking the felt sense, and receiving whatever comes (1981, 1996). Although participants in this study were not explicitly guided through these movements, a comparable process did occur in the interviews themselves. Utilizing Gendlin's terminology, this process might look something like this in comparison: First, a space was cleared. Next, instead of coming into contact with a felt sense and getting a handle on it, participants were offered a handle (i.e., the experience of NDC). Finally, participants were invited to contact the felt sense of that handle. In other words they were asked: what is your direct experience of NDC? There was no direct instruction, as in Gendlin's model, to ask the felt sense of NDC anything and to receive whatever comes. However the

invitation was to stay with the experience and continue to describe it, which for some participants did lead to the felt sense revealing itself in new ways, akin to the felt shift Gendlin describes.

For example, as Ben (p#6) described his direct experience of NDC, he began describing the sense of an internal observer. As he did so something shifted in the moment for him.

> For me in my own process I still have the observer that's right at my third eye and that's pretty hypervigilant…And it's around—there's a belief there around safety, around—is it safe. And there's kind of a, it's almost like a sticking point. There's a tension, a tightness there. (Pause)…Mmm, that spot just moved…Yeah, as that tension in my forehead moved, it kind of opened up this area a bit more (puts hand on chest). (Pause) Something shifted.

For others, a felt shift did not occur in the moment, but in their descriptions of how they attend to their experience in general a felt shift appeared to be implied. For example, in describing his sense of "a bigger underlying movement" and sense of "truth," Steven (p#2) described what he does when he feels that internally something is not aligned, which he has come to feel is connected to unconscious expectations:

> What I've discovered for myself is if I start inquiring, just describing, describing, describing, I tend to locate the expectations. And then by not trying to fix them, but keep describing them and feeling them and talking about them, they tend to right themselves into a new order and then this feels like this is the road to go down and I go down that road.

As mentioned, the process by which participants were invited to attend to their direct experience in this study, by asking them to describe their felt experience of NDC, was something like giving them a handle first. One point of interest and comparison is Gendlin's discussion of this particular movement,

"finding a handle." For Gendlin, finding the right handle is an important step in the process of Focusing, one which he suggests is critical to the possibility of an eventual felt shift. Although Gendlin argues that experiencing is what provides the direct referent for conceptualization, the importance of the handle seems to imply that experiencing and conceptualization are a back and forth process in which both are important in the context of therapeutic change. Related to the process of NDC, it might be that the desire expressed by Sophia (p#5), to have words that could help her better understand her experience, is something like wanting to find the right handle. However, as implied by the overall results in this study, it seems that where the process of NDC differs from Gendlin's model is that, eventually, even the words themselves are seen to be constructions of the mind, no longer necessary in the larger context of constantly unfolding experience. Gendlin may agree on this point, however, does not explicitly discuss this in his writings.

These results, as well as other descriptions in which participants talked about how they address moments of feeling tension or decreased opening to NDC, parallel Gendlin's model in some significant ways. In particular, they suggest that Gendlin is quite accurate that if internal experience can be attended to in a particular way, without judgment, and with curiosity, that the experience changes, often opening and revealing new information in the form of a felt shift. Gendlin asserted that, when the felt sense of any given situation shifts, we shift. If we draw a parallel between the shifts described by participants in this study, then I believe it is also fair to draw a parallel between the more life changing shifts Gendlin

alluded to and the transpersonal shifts that participants also describe in their overall process of NDC over time.

All of the participants of this study alluded to some way in which they have come to be with and inspect their direct experiences more often and with more openness to whatever it might reveal. For example, Paul (p#1) referred to the very specific practices of Dzogchen in which he does this, Ellen (p#7) and Laura (p#8) described simply being with whatever arises in the moment with no particular guiding practice, and Sophia (p#5) described how she contacts her direct experience in just this same way via the practice of Authentic Movement. If similarities can be drawn between these various practices and Focusing, what then is the relationship between Gendlin's model and the ongoing experience of NDC?

If the experience of NDC is one in which experience itself is less and less conditioned, eventually, not conditioned at all (like Ellen's invitation to me to simply *be)* then, it seems quite plausible that Gendlin's observations leading to the development of Focusing bear a connection to the experience of NDC. In other words, it seems that what Gendlin observed is that the more closely people can be in contact with their direct experience (ie, process) versus reacting to the content of their experience, the more often they were also in contact with the shifts that emerged in these experiences, and that ultimately this is a positive experience.

The results of this study suggest that the process of NDC involves a closer and closer alignment to one's felt experience at any given moment, whatever that experience may be. Alignment, meaning that there is more attunement,

acceptance, and less reactivity towards or against inner experience. Suggested by participants who experienced a stabilization of NDC is that eventually in this process, the space between oneself and one's experience, caused by the ongoing reactivity towards experience, eventually collapses revealing experience experiencing itself. Focusing then may be one of any number of practices, like inquiry or meditation for example that enhance, strengthen, or guide one into coming closer to being with their direct experience without reactivity. As Welwood (2000) suggested, Focusing may be but one technique for moving from the conceptual level of mind to the experiential level of mind-body itself. Whatever means by which one arrives, direct experience then becomes an opportunity for something to open and shift. As Ellen (p#7) stated:

> There's an accurateness in our experience…and it's the experience itself that will take us back to the source if we let ourselves have it fully. If we can actually be here for that it can't help but go back to the source, because that's the only thing that we'll ever find if we're willing to go all the way through with anything; a thought, feeling, a movement, emotion, anything. It will always return…Anything is a doorway. Everything is a doorway. There's nothing that's not a doorway because there's nothing that's on the other side of the door.

Although Gendlin in his work that lead to the development of Focusing was not interested in transpersonal experiences per se, it does appear that, if we take the process by which participants described their experience of NDC in the moment and over time to be similar to the process described by Gendlin, then, as suggested by Ellen, there is no end to the depth that experience can unfold.

In his work, Gendlin also describes how with each felt sense unfolding into the next, a renewed sense of truth is experienced. This truth is not an "absolute truth" according to Gendlin, but rather a felt experience that changes

moment to moment. Results in this study suggest that, like Gendlin's description, the experience of NDC includes a felt sense of "truth" that changes moment to moment, and that there is also a felt experience of one's alignment with this sense of truth. Possibly due to the experience described by several participants of "a bigger underlying movement," this sense of "truth" seems to be related to something beyond what Gendlin implies in his descriptions. Although participants did not state this directly, it might be that the sense of always changing "truth" they described is experienced within a larger context in which the sense of "truth" emerges from the more ineffable source or backdrop referred to as a mystery.

Although I have chosen to describe this level of experience as the "absolute" in contrast to "phenomenal," as explicated earlier in this chapter, I use this terminology somewhat differently than Gendlin in his statement that truth is not absolute. I imagine that in Gendlin's usage of the term "absolute" he is warning against the idea of truth being some fixed, objective, and unchanging truth that is in some way better than or distinct from any other truth. I believe that to describe anything as "absolute" is somewhat problematic because it is often associated with this definition. It is my intention, however, in using the term "absolute" to refer, instead to the idea of a level of experience that in its wholeness and timelessness is not dependent on any particular condition for its existence.

Discussion of nondual consciousness, John Welwood, and the *unfolding of experience.*

Specifically related to the work of John Welwood (2000) and his description of the "unfolding of experience," some comparisons can be made in reference to the results of this study. Firstly, results from this study support Welwood's assertion that there is a natural unfolding process to subjective experience and that psychospiritual unfolding includes both horizontal shifts, as when implicit felt meaning is made explicit, and vertical shifts, as when there is an experiential shift from the realm of the self or personality to the realm of pure being. Results described in primary category 1 related to the theme of "NDC as a process over time" reflect the various shifts within each of these levels experienced by participants.

In their discussions of NDC in their lives over time, many participants referred to extremely significant moments of NDC, much like the vertical shifts Welwood describes. For some these were referred to as awakenings, for others these were felt to be isolated peak experiences, and for a few were simply moments of profound seeing and experiencing of one's self as undivided consciousness. Results further suggest that these experiences occurred within the context of and alongside more gradual developments over time, much like the horizontal shifts Welwood describes. Some participants described a process of deconstruction, of "seeing through identifications," or of overall deconditioning. Implied by these participants was that both the vertical and horizontal shifts were

significant in the overall process of NDC. The specifics of the connection between the two appear to vary.

Some participants emphasized how gradual developments they experienced primed them for more immediate or vertical shifts in development. For others, it seems that vertical shifts experienced early on in their process, as with profound and unexpected experiences of NDC, initiated a process of more gradual and conscious development over time. This latter kind of development of NDC was especially illustrated by participants who described profound early experiences of NDC which then brought on a stage of seeking, which often came to represent a much more gradual process of ego deconstruction. For others, it seems that gradual development, especially of ego strengthening versus deconstructing, helped them manage experiences of NDC, in which they felt overwhelmed or flooded by their experience.

Results suggest that in terms of Welwood's model, the experience of NDC as a process over time among all participants reveals both vertical and horizontal shifts. However, what was interesting in this study was how much variation there was among participants in their descriptions of these developmental shifts and in the context within which they emerged. One reason for this finding may be the fact that participants were not selected for this study in terms of where they were in the overall development process of NDC, simply that they had regular ongoing experiences of NDC. This is in contrast to other studies in which NDC has been studied only in those individuals who have been recognized as having reached a particular stage of spiritual development.

An interesting observation of these results and Welwood's work relates to ego development and psychospiritual development in general. Welwood (2000) seems to emphasize the experience in which ego identity is formed and then, with the experience of an "identity crisis" by which we come to sense that this identity is a false one, we are invited to engage in a larger process of psychospiritual development. This is the type of process described by many of the participants, especially those who described significant early experiences which seemed to awaken them to something beyond their constructed egos, thus initiating the type of crisis that Welwood suggests. However, for participants like Sophia (p#5) for example, there was no such crisis. Instead, Sophia seems to describe a process by which the development of a constructed ego was a very conscious experience and one that is ongoing and that she continues to rely upon to manage and contain her overall sense of NDC, which can actually have an overwhelming effect. Although not discussed explicitly, it seems that Welwood's model assumes a development from pre-egoic consciousness to egoic development, which is perhaps a prerequisite for the type of psychospiritual development that he then describes.

Another point of comparison between this study and the work of Welwood is related to the information captured in the results illustrated by primary Category 2, reflecting the directly felt experience of NDC. In his book *Toward a Psychology of Awakening,* Welwood (2000) distinguished between relative emptiness, absolute emptiness, and "big mind." For Welwood, relative emptiness refers to the gaps or "spaces between thoughts, moments of quiet, diffuse felt senses, that we experience in the ongoing stream of experience" (p. 54). Absolute

emptiness refers to what lies beyond these gaps, which is “an absolute stillness or emptiness whose space and silence actually pervade, and thus cannot be displaced by whatever goes on in the mind” (p. 54-55). Borrowing from the words of Zen master Suzuki Roshi, Welwood describes how thoughts as well as the spaces between thoughts are contained within a larger background described as “big mind.” Welwood (2000) describes big mind as “a no-man’s land- free, open, reality without reference points, property boundaries, or trail markers” (p. 56). Although this nothingness is not graspable as an object, he goes on to say, referring to the words of a Tibetan text, it is nonetheless “experienceable” (as cited in Welwood, 2000, p. 56). Welwood’s descriptions of relative and absolute emptiness, as well as big mind, may be one way of referring to the various descriptions of experience presented in the results of this study, and discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, particularly in my description of absolute and phenomenal levels of experience.

Discussion of results and other models of psychospiritual development.

Several other models of psychospiritual development discussed in the review of the literature are relevant to the findings of this dissertation. Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn, have presented developmental models describing the development of consciousness and the presence of NDC, either as a state or structure. Results of this study suggest that, as Wilber’s (2000, 2006) model describes, NDC can in fact be experienced as both a state and a structure. This

was probably most evident in the observation that participants in this study all described experiences of NDC which were state-like, in contrast to the description of only a few participants who articulated a process by which NDC had become a stabilized structure as well. As described earlier, it may also be that for participants whose experience of NDC is that it is more foreground and stabilized, the experience is more structure-like, versus those who experience more fluctuations in their experience of NDC and so the experience feels more state-like.

Results do seem to also support Washburn's (1995, 2003) argument for development conceptualized as a cycle in which developmental milestones are revisited. Several participants referred to similar experiences revisited over time in their own lives, whereby certain shifts in consciousness have occurred although other aspects of development are returned to. The reference to a more ineffable source, mystery or ground from which everything is felt to emerge is also in line with Washburn's description of the dynamic ground. Because psychospiritual development was not the central focus of this dissertation, and participants varied in their developmental experiences, definitive conclusions about participants' experiences and the models presented by Wilber (2000, 2006) and Washburn (1995, 2003) are not made here. Several recent dissertations, however, such as those by Michael Costeines (2009), Arvin Paul (2008), and Puran Khalsa (2008) collected data regarding the actual lived experiences of individuals who have realized high levels of spiritual development and have compared them with the theoretical models of Wilber and Washburn. Conclusions drawn by these other

studies do offer some insights into several theoretical questions posed in earlier chapters and reflected in the results of this dissertation.

For one, Costeines' (2009), Paul's (2008), and Khalsa's (2008) studies all suggest that NDC is a development over time. In addition to conclusions already discussed in earlier parts of this chapter, both Paul and Costeines also described specific qualities of the experience of NDC, suggesting that, despite its ineffability, the experience of fully realized consciousness is unmistakable and describable. This study also supports the finding that, even if participants cannot comprehensively describe NDC per se, the *experience* of NDC can be described and common characteristics have been identified. Paul and Costeines are among researchers who have provided descriptions of the experience of NDC when it is fully stabilized and as it is experienced within one's life over time. Summaries of their findings have been presented and can be referred to in the review of the literature in Chapter 2.

Implications of Results for Theory and Clinical Practice

There are a number of implications for theory and clinical practice that emerge from results of the present study. In regards to theory, the results of the present study offer support for transpersonal theories and psychospiritual models that suggest that personality, psychological development, and spirituality are intertwined, and that the study of both is needed to understand what might be best called psychospiritual development. Results of this study further suggest that whether from the perspective of psychology or spirituality, experiences of NDC

are felt and experienced in the body. For traditional psychology, this finding implies that what is beyond our personal psychologies can be experienced, and that a more comprehensive psychology will need to take this into account. For spirituality, this finding suggests that, even that which is beyond the personal is felt through and functions within the body.

In terms of its implications for clinical practice the simple finding in this study that nondual consciousness can be felt and described in the moment is important. Just as Gendlin found in his work, clients who are able to sense and explore their inner experience in a felt experiential way, in contrast to staying merely on the more abstract level of content, were able to make significant changes in therapy. Whether or not it is a result of the presence of NDC or a predisposing factor to NDC, the experience of NDC in one's life appears to be connected in some way to individual's capacity to do just what Gendlin suggested. For this reason, this study offers support for the view that experiences connected to NDC are of significance and when brought into therapy, should not be overlooked or pathologized. Furthermore, the finding that participant's experiences of NDC were felt to be of personal importance regardless of where they might be in an overall process of NDC suggests that, whether in the spiritual or psychological realm, these experiences are felt to be profound. True to the nature of subjective experience, and to an ethical clinical model, these experiences should be honored and explored if individuals are interested in doing so, or at the very least, clinicians who do not feel capable of this, should consider referring clients to clinicians who are.

Finally, the findings related to the felt sense of mutuality suggest that, not only is the experience of NDC significant in and of itself, but that this experience may resonate with others. This is highly significant in consideration of clinical work and the possibility of mutually felt experiences between therapists and clients.

Limitations of Present Study and Recommendations Future Research

There were several limitations to the present study. In exploring the question, "what is the felt experience of nondual consciousness," I set out to look primarily at the subjective experience of NDC as it was directly felt. I also wanted to inquire into the conditions, contexts, and stories of how NDC had emerged for each participant. Although these different aspects of NDC are clearly significant in the overall understanding of the felt experience in the moment, the exploration of each one of them could easily be an entire dissertation in and of itself. Consequently, several interesting areas which emerged in the findings were not examined thoroughly and so many questions remain unanswered. Some of these questions were related to the issue of terminology and its importance in the area of NDC, or to the importance and use of practices not only for supporting NDC, but for realization itself. Both of these are areas which, if examined in future research, could offer important additions to this area of study.

A further limitation, connected to the previous point, is that participant criteria did not require that all participants have realized a particular level of spiritual development, as some prior studies have. As such, it is unclear whether

differences in the articulation of participants' experiences are due to the phenomenon itself or simply the differences in participant's level of development of NDC and where they might be in that process as compared to each other. It could easily be argued that the overall results are limited by this factor, and that whether or not participants are even describing the same phenomenon is unclear because of the differences in the context and understanding of how the experience is occurring. This is a valid argument, especially if these results were to be taken to mean anything concrete about one's spiritual development or the nature of awakened consciousness. With that said, if in fact results in this study reveal similarities about a common phenomenon then this could also open further areas of exploration. Although some authors have gone to great lengths to collect the stories of individuals who have been recognized as having achieved profound realizations in the realm of NDC, this study suggests that, regardless of what might be called full realization, there is much to be learned from the stories of individuals regardless of where they are in their overall process of development of NDC. Given that most collected stories on this topic have focused on the stories of highly realized individuals, collecting and exploring the stories of individual's development of NDC, regardless of their level of spiritual attainment would be another interesting area of further study.

As with any study, both homogeneity and heterogeneity can be seen as limitations in varying ways. The previous limitation regarding the differences in individual's level of spiritual development reflects how the variations among participants may limit the confidence with which we can assume that participants

are describing the same experience. Conversely, some of the ways in which participants were similar may also be seen as a limitation. For example, the relatively small number of individual participants within this study and their similarity in terms of cultural and ethnic identifications may be seen as limiting the extent to which these results can be generalized. Similarly, the fact that all participants except for one were over the age of 55 years old also reduces the extent to which results can be generalized and raises the question of whether or not some experiences and developments described by participants can be attributed to age alone. It is noteworthy however, that in contrast to other recent studies of spiritual development and NDC in which participants were primarily men, this study was evenly divided between men and women. These limitations suggest several lines of future research. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study, exploring the felt experience of NDC with more participants, and with more variation among participant ages, ethnicity, and overall background.

It could be argued that one of the most significant limitations of the results of this study was the impact of my presence during the interviews. Several participants stated that my presence was a significant factor reflected in the results which described the felt sense of mutuality. However, a counterargument could be made that the impact of my presence was not necessarily a limitation, but rather allowed the relational aspect of the experience of NDC to emerge and be articulated. From my own perspective, this is one of the most intriguing aspects of the results, and one which could certainly be further explored. Related to this finding, it would also be of interest to explore what was referred to as "process

indicators" in this study. In other words, are there clearly identifiable and agreed upon indicators that suggest the experience of NDC? If there are, then how does the impact of these indicators, for example the experience of the researcher, impact the data collected? Similarly, in regards to the clinical implications of the felt sense of mutuality, are there particular preconditions for being able to consciously experience shifts in consciousness while in the presence of someone who experiences NDC? This relates to the overall question of whether or not there are specific conditions for a client (or student) to be able to experience a sense of mutuality in the presence of a therapist (or teacher), which would be another interesting area of further inquiry.

In addition to what has been already mentioned, another area of further research suggested by this study would be to explore further the possible connections between NDC and the work of Gendlin. For example, as described earlier in this chapter, participants in this study were able to come into contact with their felt experience of NDC much in the same way that Gendlin describes, and that deeply influenced the creation of Focusing. Whether the capacity to come into contact with inner experience in just this way is a precondition for or a result of the development of NDC is another interesting question. Also, in the realm of clinical work, is the ability to experience a "felt sense" and the overall process described by Gendlin a necessary precondition for being able to point to or guide someone else towards a felt sense within themselves.

Results of this study clearly support the notion that the experience of NDC is directly felt and can be articulated, not just in theory, but in the moment as it is

being lived. As such, this study reveals and supports arguments for further study of transpersonal phenomenon and the development of methods for studying such phenomenon.

Conclusion

In summary, results of this study suggest that the experience of nondual consciousness is a profoundly meaningful one, and for this group of participants, is unmistakably and deeply felt, not just as a theoretical construct, but in the moment, and in the body. This study found that several aspects of experience are significant to the felt experience of NDC overall.

One is that the terminology that individuals use to describe their experience is significant. Participants in this study used multiple terms in a variety of contexts to describe their experience. Furthermore, although there was consensus that words themselves are not equivalent with experience, many participants emphasized the importance in words nonetheless. This study also found that participants held various beliefs and ideas about the experience. Another finding is that for participants in this study NDC is a developmental process over time with significant experiences which may be shared among some. For example, the process of NDC in one's life may be heralded by early experiences of NDC. A period of seeking and striving for NDC is also not uncommon. For some, experiences of doubt and uncertainty are felt. For some, the developing process of NDC over time may eventually lead to a stabilization of

NDC. These findings suggest that, contrary to the idea that realization of NDC is immediate and at once, that NDC is rather a process over time.

In addition to these findings, participants in this study also identified various supports such as the influence of teachers and teachings which were influential to their experience of NDC. Participants also identified several important impacts of NDC on their lives, such as the experience of more letting go and allowing, more ease, more trust, and more clarity. Finally, participants described conditions that are both enhancing and inhibiting for their experience of NDC.

All of these findings, summarized in primary category 1, support the overall argument, that although the experience of NDC may in and of itself be unconditional, the experience of NDC in one’s life may include a variety of elements that influence and are influenced by the experience of NDC. These findings also offer important information regarding the overall experience of NDC as it emerges throughout one’s life and impacts one’s overall experience. For example, this study reveals that for these participants, the development of NDC has been positive overall, with experiences of more ease and trust in one’s life, more clarity and more letting go and allowing things to be exactly as they are.

In addition to the various ways in which the experience of NDC was described within each participant’s life, descriptions of the directly felt experience of NDC were also revealed. These descriptions included what were coded as essential qualities of the experience of NDC as well as the felt sense of NDC.

Some of the essential qualities identified included the overall quality of NDC as being ineffable, non-localized, dynamic, including an experience of energy, verticality, and being positively experienced.

Results also revealed participants' descriptions of various themes in reference to the felt sense of NDC. These themes described distinct felt senses themselves including a felt sense of "mutuality," of "truth," of "a bigger underlying movement," of "openness," of "form and formlessness," of "no division," and of "me-ness." Of particular note is that these findings refer to the experience of NDC described by participants in the interview itself, not merely in reflection of past experiences. In contrast to other studies, this is an especially unique contribution to the literature. Although findings from some other studies have revealed qualities of NDC that are similar or parallel to those found here, none of these studies have specifically asked participants to describe their experience in the moment. Although a subtle difference, to invite participants to describe an experience in the moment is not the same as asking them to describe a reflection upon their experience. Although the act of describing one's direct experience may still be conceptual in nature, one could argue that these descriptions reflect an aspect of NDC one step closer to experience. At the very least, these descriptions offer one more vantage point to more fully understand the nondual experience.

In this regard, this study also reveals the importance in the ongoing study of subjective experience. This study highlights that there is a natural and important meeting place for the exploration of psychology and spirituality, and

more specifically for the study of psychospiritual phenomenon and the study of subjective experience. In this domain, we find that not only are we able to explore phenomenon in a way that is alive and unknown, but that the experience for participants and researcher alike is a powerful one. As with NDC, to be with and explore experience in this way is immensely powerful in what it means to be intimate with life itself.

How we choose to describe the specific nature of what this study is exploring may be an area of debate. We might say it is exploring NDC as it is functioning in human form, or NDC as it is felt in the body, or NDC as it is experienced in the presence of another person. I suggest that these are all ways of articulating what this study explores, among many others.

Several participants emphasized the importance in not mistaking the findings of this study with the experience of NDC itself, meaning that if there is anything we can say this study does *not* reveal, it is NDC itself. I agree that these descriptions of experience are not in and of themselves what I have been calling "nondual consciousness." But contrary to the idea that the only way to describe NDC is by describing what it is not, I believe that this study does explore various aspects of what it also *is*, particularly how it *feels*. These descriptions even revealed an aspect of felt experience that, although intuited or felt in some way, was impossible to describe. Whether we call this a mystery, an unknown, the ground, or the source of NDC, this aspect of experience appears to be where all conceptual activity ceases and only unconditioned being remains. To rest here is to experience with no reference points, no thought, no movement in time and

space as we generally know it. We may call this aspect "nondual consciousness" for it is the aspect that cannot be described. However, my sense is that, to say that this ineffable mystery alone is NDC would be to leave out all of those aspects that are felt and *can* be described. The implications of these findings for clinical work are significant and, as of yet, relatively unexplored.

From one angle, this study offers a description of the functioning or experience that emerges from this point of stillness, as well as a description of awareness at the edge of this stillness. From another, this study reveals that there is experience beyond this edge that simply cannot be described. Arguably, from any angle we are forced to step aside from something else, and so even this experience becomes divided. Nondual consciousness itself requires all possible angles to be taken in with nothing left out. This study sheds light on nondual consciousness as it is felt and described, and offers support for those experiences which we may consider otherworldly or rare, revealing their existence in what we often consider to be the most mundane of forms, the human body.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies and am writing my dissertation on the Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness. Based on my own personal experiences, spiritual understanding, and curiosity, this is an area of great interest for me.

Your name was given to me by _____who suggested that your understanding and level of experience might offer an important contribution to this research. Nondual consciousness is a topic of great importance within many of the world's spiritual traditions, and is becoming increasingly referred to within traditional Western psychology as well. As it does however, it is becoming clear that the field of psychology lacks an in-depth understanding of the actual felt experience of nondual consciousness. To be able to gain the perspective and experiences of individuals who are already quite familiar and versed in their understanding of nondual consciousness would be a significant and illuminating contribution.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, your participation would involve an informal conversation that would last approximately one hour. The topics covered in the interview would focus on your own personal experience of nondual consciousness. Because of the unique nature of this topic, I am also interested in documenting the experience of nondual consciousness as it is actually being lived. This is something that I hope will happen organically within the conversation or can even be done on your own after we meet.

If this is something that you think you might be interested in, please give me a call or send an email and we can discuss the project further. You can contact me at (303)819-1913 or misscommunicated@gmail.com.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to being in touch.

Sincerely

Michal Fire

Appendix B

Participant Bill of Rights

Bill of Rights for Participants in Psychological Research
English Version

You have the right to:

1. Be treated with dignity and respect;
2. Be given a clear description of the purpose of the study and what is expected from you as a participant;
3. Be told of any benefits or risks to you that can be expected from participating in the study;
4. Know the researcher's training and experience as a psychologist;
5. Ask any questions you may have about the study;
6. Decide to participate or not without any pressure from the primary researcher;
7. Have your privacy protected within the limits of the law in California, USA;
8. Refuse to answer any research questions, refuse to participate in any part of the study or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative effects;
9. Be given a description of the overall results of the study upon request;

Discuss any concerns or file an anonymous complaint about the study with the Human Research Review Committee, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Appendix C

Interview Consent and Confidentiality Form

"Exploring the Felt Experience of Nondual Consciousness"

I understand that I am being asked by Michal Fire, a graduate student at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, to participate in a semi-structured interview focusing on the felt experience of nondual consciousness. The completion of the interview process may take anywhere from one to two hours and may include an independently tape recorded portion as well. I understand that this interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed by Michal Fire.

I also understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I can discontinue at any time. All the information gathered from the interview shall remain confidential, and personal information will only be needed to categorize type of spiritual practice and current life situations. Specific personal information will not be transcribed so as to keep the identity of all participants anonymous. I am still comfortable participating in the study given these facts.

I understand I may benefit from reflecting on my experience of nondual awareness. I am also aware that there may be no direct benefit from participating in this process. If I am dissatisfied at any time with any part of the study, I may report my concerns to the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 or by telephone at (415) 575-6100.

If I experience any discomfort from participating in this study, I am aware that I may contact Michal Fire at (303) 819-1913 for a referral to a licensed psychotherapist for a free psychotherapy session. I have received and read the "Participant Bill of Rights." I understand that all data collected from this study will be locked in a private file cabinet at the residence of Michal Fire. These audio recordings will be transcribed for further analysis. Three years after completion of this study, all audio recordings in Michal Fire's possession will be recorded over and destroyed. I understand I have the option to read over the transcriptions before the final version of the dissertation is presented to the committee.

_____I have received a written copy of the Bill of Rights for Participants in Psychological Research.

_____I would like to consult on the findings related to my interview before they are presented to the committee.

_____I would like a summary of the research findings.

____I consent to participation in the study conducted by Michal Fire in fulfillment of her doctorate degree in psychology.

Name **Date**

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire for Participants

Demographic Questions for Participants:

If you have any questions please contact Michal Fire, at (303) 819-1913 or misscommunicated@gmail.com.

Name____

Address____

Phone Number____

Email____

Age_____ Sex: F / M Ethnicity________________

Place of birth___________________________

First Language____

Languages Spoken____

Marital/domestic partner status_______________ # of children____________

Occupation____

Total # of years of formal education __________________________________

Current religious/spiritual tradition (s), if any____________________________

Former religious/spiritual tradition(s), if any______________________________

Current spiritual "practice (s)" if any____________________________________

Appendix E

Consensual Coding Procedure Template

Qualitative Coders' Training **[Date]**

Working title: [enter here]

Abstract
[Cut and paste your abstract here.]

Research Questions
The present study is designed to answer the following research questions:

[Enter your research questions here.]

The interview questions are designed to obtain knowledge, descriptors, concepts, phrases, and words to be used as evidence or data that answers each research question.

In describing their experiences, interviewees are expected to mention ______________________________________. They are expected ____. They may ____. Coders need to be prepared to listen to personal narratives that may at times be distressing to the coders.

How to do qualitative data coding
In coding and analyzing the interviews, we will use a procedure, which is akin to "Grounded Theory" methodology. We are using this methodology so that in approaching the interview transcripts, we can insure that we are "hearing" what the interviewees had to say with as little interference from preconceptions as possible. Of course, we can never escape our personal, cultural, gendered perceptual lenses entirely.

Step 1
To begin, we need to become familiar with the research questions by discussing them together. We want to have a common understanding of what the question really is. This is more difficult than it first appears. As we proceed, we may find ourselves returning to this issue of the "real question."

Step 2
Practitioners of qualitative methods speak of a process called bracketing in which we become aware of and attempt to set aside our individual preconceptions. To accomplish this, the transcript readers/coders will begin the work by discussing our personal viewpoints with each other. These may come to the surface as we read and react to the abstract and research questions together. Our goal is to become explicit about our own and each other's positions, so that we can help each other avoid interpretive bias as we code the transcripts. As coding proceeds, we can gently point out to each other when we think another is producing idiosyncratic coding that is not true to the transcript. Of course, this requires that a considerable amount of trust be maintained between project coders.

Step 3
The next step is for all of the coders to take the transcripts (or some of them) home and read them through thoroughly, to develop an overall sense of the material.

Step 4
When we get back together, we will begin coding the transcripts using an unstructured method called open coding. Open coding essentially means that we are developing the coding scheme or the "code book" as we go. We are not being constrained by any pre-existing coding system or theoretical guidelines. So, we do not begin with a preset list of codes and characteristics to look for. Rather, as we read the transcripts, we highlight phrases, sentences, and whole utterances that seem to speak to the research questions. In the beginning, the exact "chunk" size is also something that needs to be determined—is it a word or is it a whole utterance? Since we are working together in the same room at the beginning of the process, we can go through the transcripts line by line to develop a common sense of what to code. In this early phase, we can also try to develop a common language for coding similar ideas and themes.

The process of open coding goes on for a long period until all the transcripts have been coded. It is a slow process in the beginning but goes more quickly after several transcripts have been coded. By the third or fourth transcripts, most of the codes have occurred and been named. Later transcripts are coded using codes that already exist—few new codes are added to list as time goes by.

The final step of this phase is to read back through the transcripts and make sure that codes have been applied in a consistent way across transcripts.

Step 5
The next step includes category coding and is not actually separate from the open coding process.

During open coding, coders will begin to notice groups of codes that seem to go together into one category or kind of code. Coders can make note of these relationships in marginal notes or memos for later processing or the categories can become part of the coding system, being applied as coding proceeds. So, this

phase of the process may be carried out by the principal investigator alone or with the assistance of one or more coders. Open codes that seem to fall into common categories are grouped together under higher order category codes. If the structure of the data warrants it, additional levels of structure may be represented by superordinate levels of codes. The emerging structure is then depicted by outlining the categories and their member codes in an outline or graphically (axial coding). Often, in research on psychological processes, some of the clusters may refer to temporal sequences. In Grounded Theory, categories for antecedents, causal conditions, central category, and consequences are common.

Step 6

In a complete work of Grounded Theory, the coding process would suggest a preliminary theory about the phenomenon or process. In the present study, the endpoint does not require new theory making but rather answering the research questions in a clear way. In the simplest case, this involves using the codes and categories to describe ____ per the research questions. The final answers will be shaped both by the experiences reported in the interviews and by the preexisting questions of the investigator. There may also be answers to questions that were not asked!

It is also desirable to determine the most frequently occurring codes and also whether these codes are representative in the sense that they occur in all the transcripts. So, the frequency and distribution of codes and categories is one outcome. When there is considerable consensus across interviews, a common narrative description of the phenomenon or process under study may be created. If there is no consensus, are there several discernable patterns that can be described?

Step 7

This step—data reduction and data display—is usually completed by the principle investigator. Finding a concise way to present the voluminous data of qualitative studies is a challenge. Qualitative data handling software, such as Ethnograph or NVivo , may be used, but is not necessary. In any case, the richness of the narratives needs to be preserved while summary conclusions and patterns of findings are also presented. Using models of other successful data presentations strategies is a good idea. See for reference:

❖ A published dissertation model: Phelps, A., Friedlander, M.L., and Enns, C.Z. (1997). Psychotherapy process variables associated with the retrieval of memories of childhood sexual abuse: A qualitative study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 44*(3), 321-332.

❖ Miles, M.B., and Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis, An expanded sourcebook,* 2nd ed. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Overall reference:

Straus, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research, techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.) Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.